STREET AND SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY

10 CENTS

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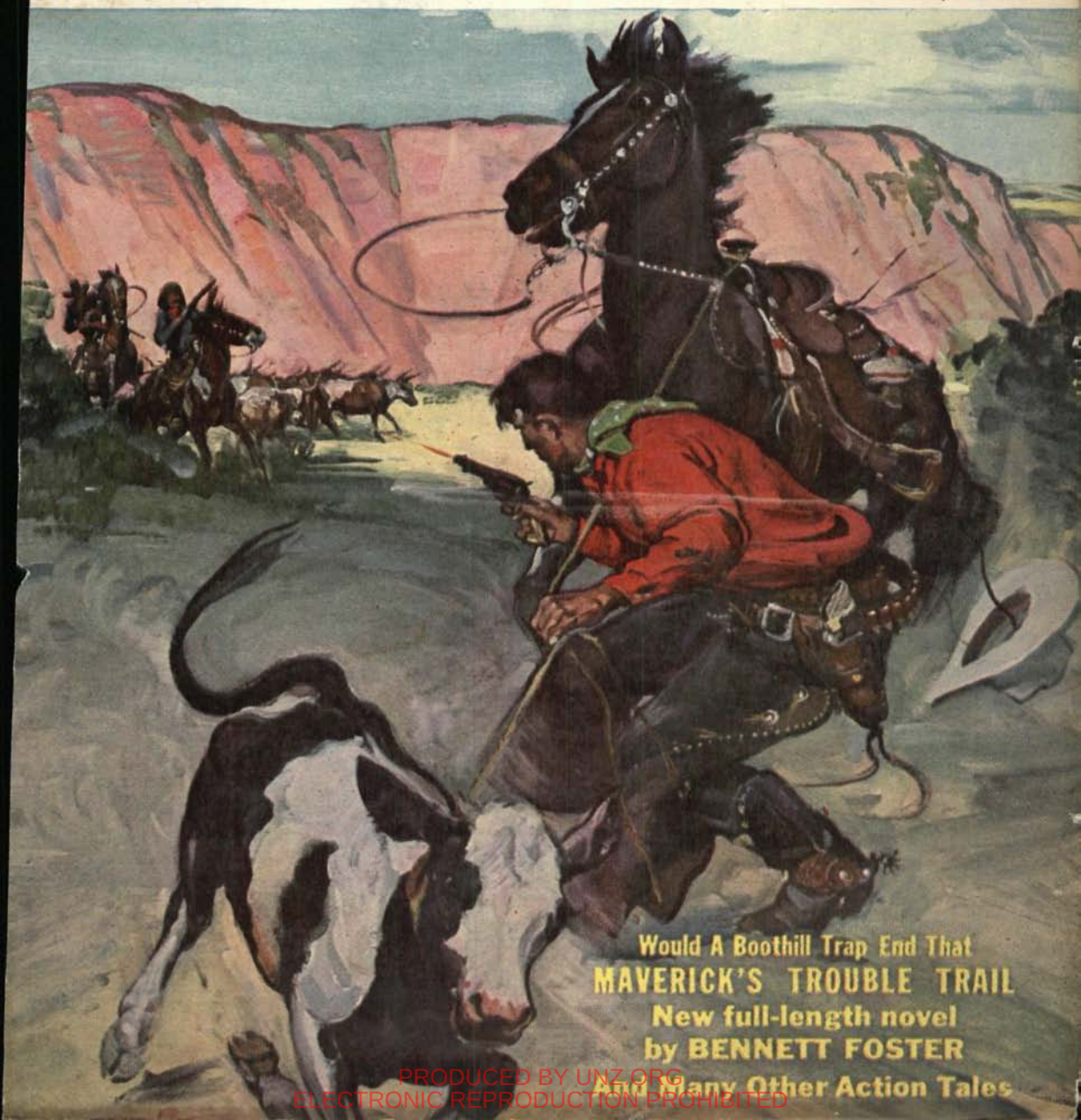
JANUARY 10, 1942



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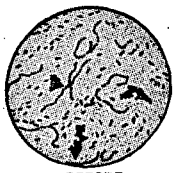

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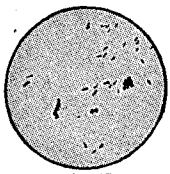

AFTER

NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS

The two drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

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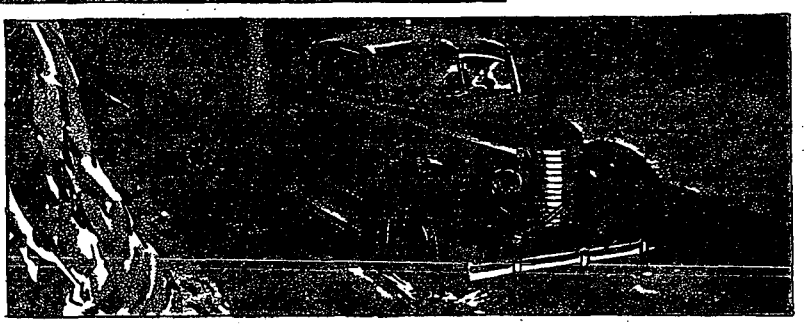

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CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 10, 1942 VOL. CXCVI, No. 6

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MAVERICK'S TROUBLE TRAIL . . . . . **Bennett Foster** 9

"Pinos Altos doesn't need any brand artists," Jiggs Maunday was told. But Jiggs, his guns still smoking from a border range war, didn't agree—Pinos Altos needed a brand artist, all right—the kind that could change the brands on a crew of double-crossing, bushwhacking cattle thieves!

A SERIAL

THE RENEGADE . . . . . **L. L. Foreman** 100

Second of five parts

With the murder of the defenseless Luta-ho-ota, Wapaha Jim knows there can no longer be any truce between him and the white soldiers—from now on he must be a Sioux warrior sworn to vengeance. . . .

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"You've got to fight the devil with his own tools," declared Rusty Ryan—but a smoking six-gun was the only weapon that counted against a vengeance-twisted double-crosser. . . .

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COVER BY H. W. SCOTT

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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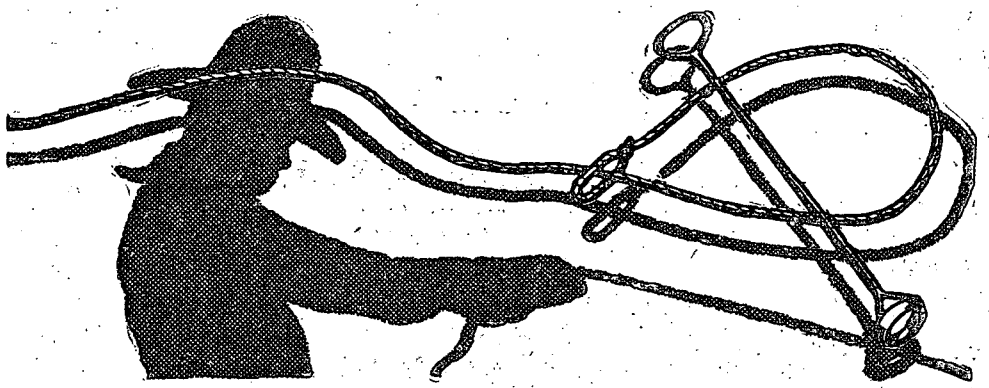

The Roundup

FROM Almartha, Missouri, comes a note from Mr. Eddie Fry which says he is glad to know that Bennett Foster will soon be represented by a novel and serial. However, Mr. Fry says he hopes the new serial will be better than THE MEXICAN SADDLE, Foster's last. We won't say anything except that the complete novel, MAVERICK'S TROUBLE TRAIL, can be found beginning on page 9 of this issue. Give it a whirl and let us know how it stacks up.

Mr. Fry also asks for the addresses of several authors. If any of the readers ever care to write to an author, address your letter to him and send it care of Western Story. We shall be glad to forward all letters.

And Mrs. Gilbert Blake, of Virginia City, Nevada, writes that she has been a reader of Western Story longer than she can remember. Just in case we had any queries or adverse comments on the use of peyote buttons in William Colt MacDonald's story, PEYOTE PISTOLEERS, Mrs. Blake inclosed a newspaper clipping telling of the efforts to curb the use of the narcotic plant in Nevada.

Authorities say that the practice of chewing peyote buttons is not common but some Indians indulge during meetings of a particular religious sect. The State legislature made possession of peyote a gross misdemeanor under an act passed in 1941.

We sure do like to take care of questions before they are raised. All the above is right in line with the use MacDonald made of peyote chewers in his story.

Next week's big issue brings you BRAND OF THE LAWLESS, a swift-moving novel of the North by Frank Richardson Pierce—the story of a salty young hombre who dared death at the hands of marauding sea wolves to harvest a rich fur crop on a bleak arctic island; outstanding stories of the cow country by Cherry Wilson, Norman A. Fox, Ney N. Geer, George Cory Franklin and many other favorites; a full string of departments and features, plus, of course, a new installment of L. L. Foreman's gripping serial, THE RENEGADE.

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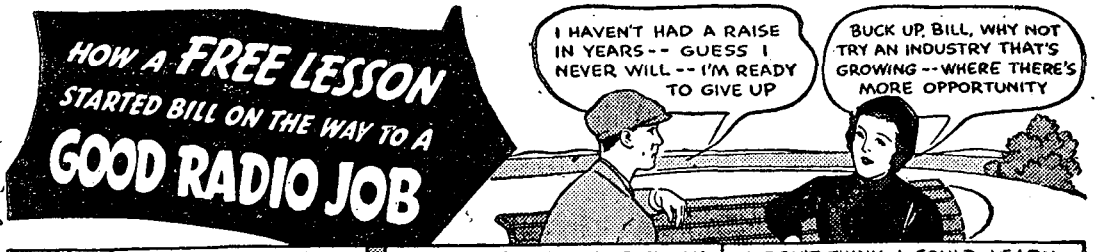

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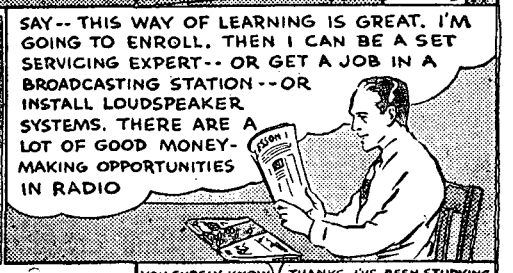

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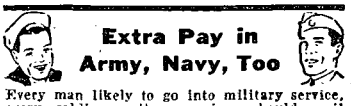

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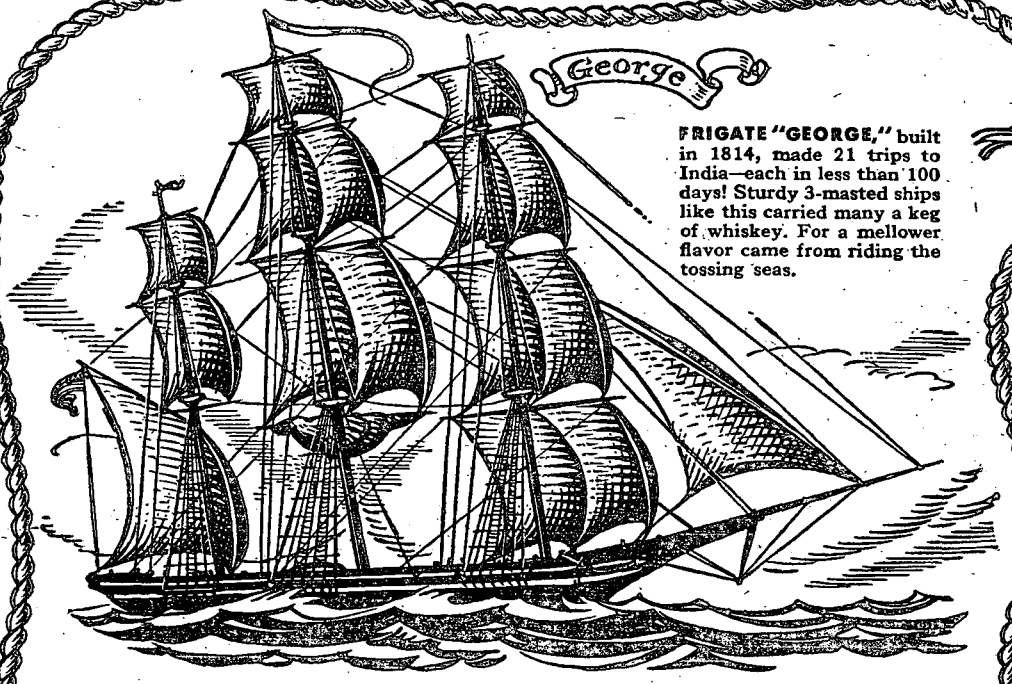

FRIGATE "GEORGE," built in 1814, made 21 trips to India—each in less than 100 days! Sturdy 3-masted ships like this carried many a keg of whiskey. For a mellower flavor came from riding the tossing seas.

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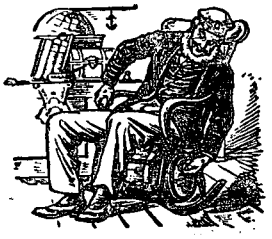

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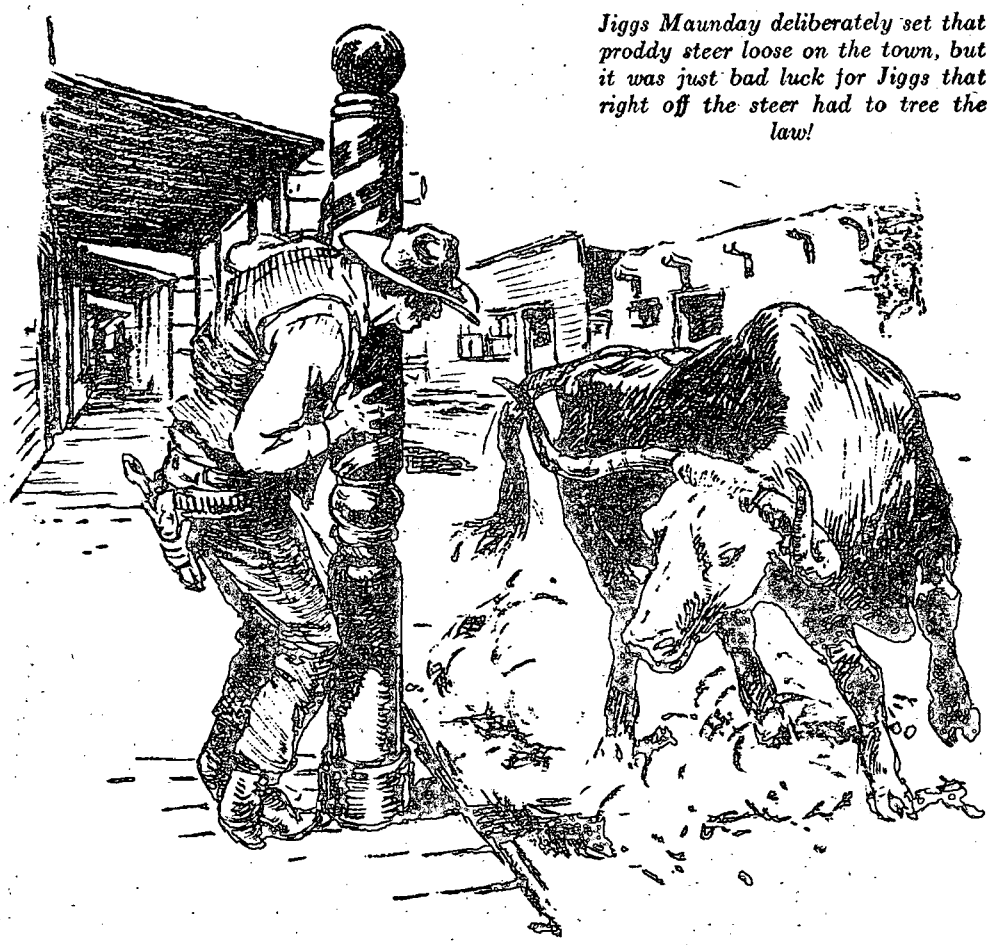

Jiggs Maunday deliberately set that proddy steer loose on the town, but it was just bad luck for Jiggs that right off the steer had to tree the law!

MAVERICK'S TROUBLE TRAIL

by Bennett Foster

CHAPTER I

STEER STAMPEDE

THE bartender drew lines in the wetness on the bar top, lifted his finger, and asked: "What'd you call that?"

Jiggs Maunday, leaning forward, surveyed the bartender's masterpiece. For five minutes Jiggs had been engaged in this pleasant discussion and it was about time for matters to come to a head.

"That's a TU," he answered. "Kind of a fool brand, if you ask me."

The bartender fancied himself as a brand expert. Bartenders always

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knew more about everything than anybody else—bankers excepted—and Jiggs was almost ready to spring his trap. Jiggs, who had read brands from the Montana border on down into Sonora, had a scheme in mind. Presently he would produce a Running VW on the bar top and bet the bartender a glass of beer that he couldn't read it. The Running VW could be read two ways, as a VW or an M Open A, which made reading it a "heads I win, tails you lose" proposition. The bartender would be stuck for the drinks. That was the kind of bet that Jiggs needed, for he was broke.

"What do you mean a 'fool' brand?" The bartender raised his voice indignantly. "The TU is one of the oldest brands around here."

At the end of the room the three men who sat around the card table broke off their conversation and looked toward the two at the bar. They had been occupied when Jiggs came in the Home Ranch Saloon and had paid no attention to anything save their own talk. Now the bartender's question pierced their preoccupation.

"It's a fool brand because it can be changed so easy." Jiggs did not glance toward the men at the card table. He hardly knew that they were there. "Look here." Dipping his forefinger into a drop of beer, he drew a loop above the T that the bartender had made, joining its ends to the bar of the T. Two deft touches and the lower U was also closed with the T. "That's a Buckle," Jiggs announced. "Any brand that can be changed as easy as that is a fool brand."

At the card table the smooth-shaven, dark-faced man nodded his head. At the signal both his companions got up and the smaller of the two said with deference: "Shall we run him out, Mr. Carmody?"

Jiggs did not hear the words. He was watching the bartender, ready to obliterate him if he tried to argue.

"Out of town and out of the country." Carmody's answer was soft. "Maybe he's the man we've been expecting, Nick."

The big man who wore a star on his vest scowled fiercely. Nick, the small man, narrowed his eyes. "Then hadn't we better—" he began.

Carmody shook his head. "Just run him out," he ordered. "If he's only a drifter, he'll go. If he isn't —" He shrugged. Nick and the big man wheeled and strode purposefully toward the bar.

JIGGS, still waiting for the bartender's rebuttal, was apprised of an addition to his audience by a hot breath on his neck and a voice that said silkily: "You know a heap about brands, don't you, stranger?"

Looking around, Jiggs saw that a big man had come up on his right and was bending over him. A swift glance to the left showed a second addition, small, mustached, and with a gun on his hip.

"A heap too much, if you ask me," the little fellow said. Both the big man and the small man retreated half a step, leaving Jiggs with a singularly lonely feeling.

"Well?" the big man rasped.

"I've seen a few brands," stated Jiggs.

"An' changed a few?" the small man drawled.

Jiggs knew why he felt lonesome. Necessity had forced him to pawn the Colt that usually rode at his hip. He had debated a long time between the Colt and the Winchester saddle gun, and the Winchester had won. Now it seemed that his decision had been unwise.

"What's yore name, mister, an'

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where are you from?" the big sheriff demanded. Maybe, Jiggs thought, the star the man wore gave his interrogator a right to ask questions like that.

"That ain't important," the small man stated. "What counts is where yo're goin'. Where *are* you goin', mister?"

Jiggs looked around. He was flanked on either side by these two rock-faced men. The bartender had backed off until he was pressed against the back bar, and at the card table the smooth, dark man was cleaning his fingernails with a penknife and paying strict attention to the job.

"We was just drawin' brands, Nick," the bartender faltered. "There wasn't nothin' personal."

Nick, the small man, nodded. "Yeah," he said smoothly. "I seen that you was just drawin' brands. Well, Pinos Altos don't need no brand artists. We got aplenty. You're headin' out of town, ain't you, friend?"

Wisdom dictated Jiggs' reply. "Just passin' through."

"An' out of the county, too." The man who wore the sheriff's star didn't ask a question; he made a statement.

"Well—" Jiggs said.

"That's yore horse out there," the officer said. "I'm sheriff of Pinos County an' I don't like vagrants. You look like a vagrant."

Very carefully Jiggs pulled his one remaining dime from his pocket and placed it on the bar top. "For the beer," he said. "So long." Turning, he walked to the door. He hated to turn his back on those two cold-eyed snakes but there was nothing else to do. Boot heels thumped on the floor as the sheriff and Nick followed.

Jiggs pushed through the door, crossed the sidewalk and ducked under the hitch rail. Quien Sabe eyed him reproachfully as he unwrapped the reins from the pole.

"Yo're leavin' us then?" the sheriff asked.

"I thought I'd ride out." Jiggs backed his horse away from the rail, and mounted. The butt of the Winchester saddle gun was close by his right hand and he felt a lot better.

"An' you ain't comin' back," Nick stated definitely.

Men came out of the store across the street. On the porch of the saddle shop next door the loafers were craning their necks and grinning. Jiggs heard a voice say, "Runnin' another drifter out of town," and along the back of his neck his brown hair bristled as anger welled in him.

"I wouldn't say that," Jiggs drawled answer to the small man's statement. "No, I couldn't promise that." He swung Quien Sabe half around, checked the horse and added another word. "If I come back, I'll try to see you two first. *Hasta la vista,* gents."

Quien Sabe came on around now and started down the street toward the east. Jiggs' back was broad and flat and he did not turn his head. The two men on the sidewalk in front of the Home Ranch exchanged glances and then wheeled and went back into the saloon.

"Well?" Jess Carmody, at the card table, closed his knife and put it away.

"Just a drifter." Nick sat down to Carmody's left.

"What do you think, Henry?"

Henry Ward, sheriff of Pinos County, shrugged big shoulders. "Nick's right, I guess," he answered. "But— He was a cold proposition, wasn't he, Nick?"

Carmody tapped the top of the table with his fingers. "We don't

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need strangers around here," he said. "Not the way things are. Not with the trouble that we're having."

ALL the way from Chichupa on north, Jiggs Maunday had been just missing what he needed. In Agua Prieta, down under the border, he had failed to find the fifth spade for a flush when all his fortune was in the middle of the table and, consequently, had parted with his Colt in a Douglas pawnshop. In Tucson, the horse he bet on finished a bad second in a two-horse race.

He had missed out on a job at Dos Cabezas by ten minutes; and north of Lordsburg had innocently thrown in with two men who, the night before, had broken out of the Lordsburg jail. Jiggs and his chance acquaintances split up ahead of a posse and now, with a hundred miles and only two meals back of him, he was leaving the town of Pinos Altos.

Jiggs passed the ugly brick courthouse, the bars of the jail prominent along its side, and struck the open country. Somewhere ahead of him there had to be a camp or a ranch or some place where a man could get a meal, rest his horse and indulge in a little honest human companionship.

Looking back, Jiggs saw Pinos Altos' single business street, the stores and saloon and shops set close, making one block in which the life of the town was concentrated. A hell of a town, Pinos Altos; a no-account, inhospitable, two-bit sort of place. Quien Sabe, tired but not as hungry as his rider, struck a road that led east, and Jiggs let the horse ramble along.

The town was small against the plains when Jiggs found the steer. It was big, roan-colored and held the middle of the road. Quien Sabe, who had handled lots of steers, arrogantly assumed that the roan would give the right of way, and was apprised of his mistake by a snort and a charge which he eluded with a catlike quickness that almost unseated the preoccupied Jiggs.

Quien Sabe came around to face the steer who glared wrathfully at horse and rider. Even the cattle in the damned country were on the prod! Jiggs lifted his reins, ready to turn the horse and go on about his business and then paused as, full and fair, an idea struck him.

With Jiggs Maunday ideas and trouble were synonymous and only a deft gun hand and a disarming grin, each used where necessity dictated, had enabled him to reach the advanced age of twenty-six. The steer was making threats through distended nostrils and throwing a little dust over his shoulders with a pawing front foot.

Jiggs grinned. "Got a horn drooped, have you?" he asked conversationally. "You're a long ways from home. You belong back in town."

A low and threatening rumble came from the steer and he advanced a pace or two before stopping to throw more dust. Jiggs took down his twine, fastened the end to his saddlehorn with a figure-eight knot, and reached down to pull the front cinch tight. Quien Sabe, noting these preparations, cocked both ears at the steer while Jiggs shook out a little loop, settled himself deeply into his tree and picked up the grulla with his spurs.

Quien Sabe took mincing steps. The steer charged, the loop shot out and the grulla, cutting sharply to the right, went right on by. Jiggs stood off in his left stirrup to help the horse. The rope, tight as a fiddle string, twanged musically and the

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steer turned a hoolihan and came down with a thud and a grunt. Almost before the steer hit the ground, Jiggs was off Quien Sabe's back and running to his catch. Kneeling on the twisting roan neck, he yelled at Quien Sabe to give him slack.

The grulla took two steps forward. Jiggs pulled his rope free, scooped up a handful of dust, threw it in the steer's eyes and, jumping up, ran for Quien Sabe. He was in the saddle before the steer could scramble up. Bewildered and angry, the steer stood while Jiggs and the grulla circled around. There was plenty of fight left in the steer, but he didn't know quite where to use it. Jiggs flipped his rope forward and the hondo knot smacked the steer's rump. The animal took a lumbering step and then another as Jiggs flipped the rope again. The roan was headed in the right direction: toward Pinos Altos.

TWICE more on that two-mile journey Jiggs hoolihaned the roan steer, once when the steer stopped and sulled, and once just on general principles and because it looked as though the animal was cooling off a little. Quien Sabe was sweating freely as he turned the steer around the corner of the courthouse and into Pinos Altos' business street. Jiggs pulled the grulla to a halt and waited to see if his scheme would work. The steer, bewildered, trotted by the brick building and then, seeing a man on foot crossing the street, lowered his head and charged.

The street-crossing gentleman squalled and ran for his life, reaching a store and diving inside just ahead of the steer. Frustrated, the roan looked around, spied some loafers on the saddle-shop porch and made for them. The bench went over as they scrambled for safety and the steer went on right across the porch.

A big man whom Jiggs recognized as the sheriff, stepped out of the Home Ranch Saloon, saw the steer, tried to get back to safety and, failing, betook himself to the pole of the barber shop next door. He dodged twice around the pole while the steer feinted with long and vicious horns, tripped on the board sidewalk, sprawled and, on hands and knees, disappeared under the half shutters of the saloon, the roan's hot breath fanning the seat of his pants. The steer went on down the street and Jiggs Maunday was very happy. If only there was somebody at the end of the street to turn the steer. It seemed a pity that the roan should be running out of targets.

In answer to the wish, a horse and rider appeared west of the roan. Acting with exemplary swiftness and almost as though he had read Jiggs' mind, the rider swung his mount and came down on the steer. The roan had had aplenty of men on horseback. He wheeled cumbrously, snorted, pawed dust and, seeing the sheriff who had come out of the Home Ranch again, took up his labors once more. The sheriff dived back inside.

Nick, appearing from the barber shop, took a shot at the steer, missed, and disappeared into the shop again. Jiggs heaved a sigh. The fun was almost over. He yelled at the roan and swung his coiled rope in the animal's face. The steer wheeled to resume his labors in Pinos Altos and charged, knocking over the barber-shop pole. Then he halted, head lowered, blowing through his nose, tired out but still mad.

"They'll kill him in a minute," a quiet voice said beside Jiggs. "An'

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after they've killed him they'll shorely try to get us. Mebbe we'd better go."

Jiggs turned in his saddle. Beside him, just at the corner of the courthouse, was the man who had turned the steer at the far end of the street. A battered Stetson sat jauntily atop curly sorrel hair, and blue eyes twinkled in a rugged, weathered face.

"Mebbe we had, at that," Jiggs agreed, and, wheeling his horse, started across the straggling grass of the courthouse lawn. Brick chipped from the courthouse wall, a rifle bellowed in Pinos Altos' street. Jiggs kicked Quien Sabe with his spurs.

"You're a prophet," he stated. "Come on!" Quien Sabe turned the corner of the courthouse at a run, Jiggs' left stirrup almost touching the ground. The red-haired man was right behind him.

CHAPTER II

PINKY LARRABEE

THEY were a good three miles out of town before the red-haired man pulled up. Jiggs, bringing Quien Sabe to a sliding halt, grinned at his companion and then looked back. Pinos Altos was out of sight over a swell of ground and the red-haired man was grinning, too.

"You get good ideas," he stated. "Did you think of that all by yore-se'f or had you seen it done before?"

"Well," answered Jiggs, "I don't know that I'd seen it done. The steer was out there, kind of waitin' for somebody to come along an' give him an argument, an' them fellers back in town was lookin' for an argument, too, so I just put 'em together. How come you acted so prompt at the other end of the street?"

The redhead's grin broadened. "It looked like a waste to let the steer go," he drawled. "He was havin' so much fun that I just headed him back into it. It kind of looked like the thing to do."

Jiggs held out his hand. "My name's Jiggs Maunday when I ain't herdin' roan steers," he announced. "What's yores?"

The redhead's hand met Jiggs. "Larrabee," he stated. "I was christened William but my hair's kind of changed that. They call me Pinky."

The hands fell apart and the two appraised each other with bright, laughter-filled eyes. Both liked what they saw and the laughter, bubbling, spilled over.

"The way that sheriff went under the door!" Jiggs choked. "Like a rabbit huntin' a hole. If his shirt had been out he'd 'a' looked like a cottontail, just exactly."

"What I liked," Pinky Larrabee stifled his mirth for an instant, "was the way he played tag aroun' the barber pole. He turned like a cuttin' horse, just right back through hisse'f."

Laughter won again. Jiggs rocked in his saddle. Gradually the mirth subsided. Pinky straightened on his horse.

"You headed any place particular?" he asked.

"For a meal," Jiggs answered frankly. "I ain't ate today an' I'm broke. What I need is a job an' grub. You know where I could find 'em?"

"I don't know about the job," Pinky answered, "but if you can stand my cookin' I can feed you. How about it?"

"Lead out," Jiggs ordered. "I could stand anybody's cookin' the way I feel."

They went north, following no road, but presently striking a trail

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that led toward a line of hills. The hills, Pinky said, were the Cajas, and as they grew near, Jiggs could see how they came by their name. They sat, square and boxlike, on the plain. Presently Pinky turned east, dropped into a long fold of earth and, with the abutments of the Cajas rising on either side, stopped.

"There she is," he announced.

Jiggs looked at the rock shack, at the corrals, at the fence that cut off across the canyon and that was plainly a horse-pasture fence, and nodded. "Home growed?" he asked.

"By me, personal. She's all mine. Get down an' air off yore saddle."

Jiggs got down. In the corral he unsaddled Quien Sabe and watched the horse roll and then drink from a trough.

"Spring water," Pinky remarked. "I brought her down in a wooden trough. Had the idea one time that I'd run it to the house, but gave it up." He forked down hay from a meager stack. "Put yore saddle on the fence an' we'll go in," he directed.

THERE were two rooms in the tight little rock house. The kitchen was really fixed up; a board floor, good stove, table with oilcloth, shelves on the wall.

"You kind of do yorese'f proud," Jiggs commented, crossing to stand his .30-30 Winchester beside the door. "Two rooms an' everythin'. You couldn't rightly call this no boar's nest. Got a housekeeper?"

Pinky's answering "No!" was so sharp and curt that Jiggs glanced at him. The sorrel-haired man was scowling.

"Mighty nice place." Jiggs' voice was placating. "You sure fixed it up good. Want me to build the fire?"

"Go ahead," Pinky said, still with that curt coldness in his voice. "I'll cut some meat." He picked up a butcher knife and went out. Now how, Jiggs wondered as he began to lay the fire, had he stepped on the red-headed man's toes?

When Pinky came back he was grinning again, and Jiggs felt relief. He liked this sorrel top, all that he had seen of him, and this two-room rock house was certainly a refuge in a wilderness. Pinky put on the skillet, dumped in grease and fell to pounding the steaks. Jiggs found the coffeepot, loaded it, and put it on the stove. There was a pan of cold sour-dough biscuits and Pinky hauled down a can of corn to put in the second skillet.

"How come," he asked, as he placed the corn on the stove, "that you figgered Pinos Altos needed brightenin' up? You have a little trouble there?"

"I got called a vagrant," Jiggs informed him. "That's what I am, too, but I didn't see a need for them to rub it in like they did." He related the happenings in the Home Ranch Saloon while Pinky listened intently and turned the steak.

"Jess Carmody, Henry Ward, an' Nick Rice," he said, identifying the men in the Home Ranch. "Carmody owns the Buckle outfit and Nick is his foreman. Henry's sheriff, but when Carmody sneezes, Henry's got a cold in his head. They wouldn't have jumped you unless Carmody passed them the word."

"The Buckle outfit," Jiggs drawled. "So that's how come. I stepped right on their toes. I drawed a Buckle out of a TU. No wonder they got ringy. I just the same as called 'em rustlers."

"How'd you make the Buckle?" Pinky asked, dishing up the steak while Jiggs poured the coffee. "Did you just close the bar on top of the U?"

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"Nope. I put a U upside down over it."

There was silence for a moment while Pinky dished out the corn and put the biscuits on the table. "*They* just close the bar," he drawled. "Set down. She's all ready."

Jiggs sat down.

The coffee was strong and black, the biscuits were good, although cold, and the steak was superlative. Jiggs looked up from his place to see Pinky watching him. There was an odd look on the redhead's face.

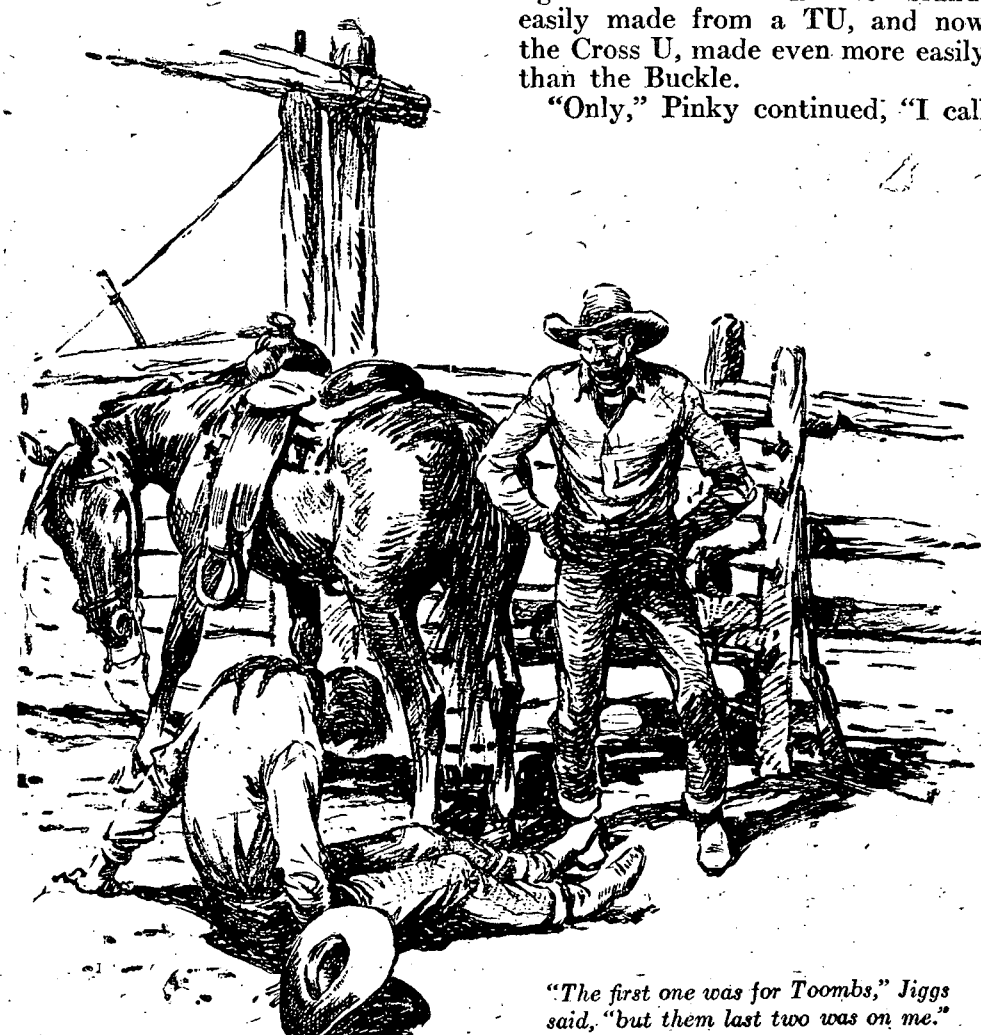
"Steak good?" the redhead asked.

"Just like mamma used to cook," Jiggs answered.

"It come from a Cross U calf," Pinky drawled. "I make the brand thisaway." He drew a diagram on the table top, Jiggs' eyes following the invisible lines on the oilcloth. "If you'd showed the bartender how to change the TU into a Cross U you'd still have been in Pinos Altos," Pinky added. "Steak still taste good?"

"Mighty fine." Jiggs took another fork load. He could see it all right now. The Buckle brand, easily made from a TU, and now the Cross U, made even more easily than the Buckle.

"Only," Pinky continued, "I call



"The first one was for Toombs," Jiggs said, "but them last two was on me."

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it a Rockin' Cross an' run the iron right on down until the cross sits on the circle."

"Who," Jiggs queried politely, "owns the TU?"

There was an instant's silence and then Pinky said: "Frank Toombs. Him an' his granddaughter, Bess. Have another cup of coffee, Jiggs?"

"Why, sure," Jiggs agreed.

AFTER the dishes were washed the two men sat outside on the stoop, savoring the pleasant night coolness and smoking. Jiggs maintained a discreet silence. In a country like this it paid to wait and let the other man take the lead. Pinky took it suddenly.

"You come a long-ways," he remarked. "That grulla horse of yores is carryin' a Mexican brand. He's gaunted up from travelin', too."

"From down in Sonora," Jiggs agreed. "I worked for the Seven Up an' Seven Down. Things got a little too tough an' the Yeager boys that owned the outfit was both killed. There didn't seem to be no point in stayin'."

Jiggs could have gone further. He could have said that he had been foreman for the Yeagers, that he had been the boss of an outfit that ran ten thousand head of cattle. He could have said, too, that the men who had killed the Yeagers were now resting under dry Sonora dirt and that their numerous kinfolks were hunting Jiggs Maunday to carry on the feud. But there was no use in mentioning those things, none at all.

"I thought," Jiggs drawled after his momentary pause, "that I'd come up north of the border and kind of live in a white man's country again."

"So you picked this for a white man's country!" Pinky's laugh was bitter. "Well, you rode too far—or not far enough."

Jiggs waited. Pinky was ripe for talk.

"The Buckle, the Rockin' Cross, an' the TU," the redhead said slowly, "all sittin' here. Frank Toombs an' the TU claim to be first, I reckon, but my daddy registered the Rockin' Cross before Toombs run his iron on a cow. Carnody moved the Buckle in here two years ago. Since then the boil's been comin' to a head."

Still Jiggs said nothing.

"Maybe you sabe how it is." Pinky Larrabee tossed his cigarette away to make a little arc in the darkness. "I used to work for the TU. I made 'em a hand. Somethin' come up an' me an' Toombs didn't see alike on it. I might as well tell you—I was goin' to marry Bess. Toombs couldn't see a forty-dollar cowhand for his granddaughter. I had a little money I'd saved. I went into the cow business. Of course I took my dad's old brand. Who wouldn't?"

Jiggs made a small sympathetic murmur.

Pinky's voice drawled on: "I bought a few cows, fixed the place up, got all lined out. I wasn't a forty-a-month cowhand no more. An old aunt died back East an' left me five thousand in insurance. I cashed the check back there an' bought some two-year-old heifers. I'll calve 'em next spring. The TU is losin' cattle. It adds up real nice, don't it?"

"An' the girl?" Jiggs said softly. "The one you was goin' to run water into the house for. How about her?"

Pinky shrugged. "Bess keeps house for Frank," he said briefly. "He's her granddaddy an' all she's got. He does the thinkin' for the TU. The Buckle is a big outfit an'

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Carmody packs a lot of weight. Who would you pick to be the rustler? The man out on the flats that runs three thousand head, or the little man in the hills that shows up with a bunch of two-year-old heifers? Simple, ain't it?"

It was indeed simple as Pinky explained it. Indignation arose in Jiggs. "Too damned simple," he growled. "Ain't there anybody in the county with brains enough to figure things out?"

Pinky shrugged. "Turner Bright is a pretty good man," he drawled. "He's the undersheriff. Sometimes I think Turner's goin' to turn his brains over an' get wise to what's goin' on. An' then again I think that if he turned his brains over he'd just find a flat rock. Turner's honest, but he ain't too smart."

THERE was a pause while Jiggs thought of another question. Pinky forestalled it. Rising, he said gruffly: "I don't know how I got to givin' up head this way. I ain't in the habit of it. Come on, let's turn in. Anyhow I got an extra bed."

Jiggs saw that his companion did not wish to talk any longer. Obediently he arose and followed Pinky into the house.

They went to bed, and Jiggs lay thinking for a while. It was quite a tale that Pinky had told him; quite a story. He drifted off to sleep, still thinking, his mind wandering from facet to facet of Pinky's explanation.

The moonlight in his face awakened Jiggs. It came streaming in through the window, illuminating the room. He turned away from the light and looked at the other bed. Pinky Larrabee should have been there, but he was not. The covers were turned back and the redhead was gone. Jiggs swung his legs over the edge of his bed and sat up. Perhaps Pinky had stepped outside and when he came back the two of them could have another smoke and then sleep again.

For a long time Jiggs sat there, waiting. Then, with a wry grin on his face, he rolled a cigarette and lighted it. Good old Jiggs Maunday! He'd believe anything and everything that was told him. He smoked the cigarette down to a stub, ground it out against the floor, and lay down again. "*Who would you pick for the rustler?*" He remembered Pinky's words. "*The big man on the flats or the little man in the hills?*"

"It all depends," Jiggs murmured. "I might pick the little man, if he rode of nights."

He closed his eyes against the moonlight and lay there thinking, but now his thoughts were of a different tenor. Presently he shrugged. After all, Pinky was a good fellow, a pretty good kind of man. He'd sided Jiggs back in Pinos Altos and he'd fed him and given him a bed. Who was Jiggs Maunday to condemn a man? In the morning he would pull along and leave the Rocking Cross and the TU and the Buckle to settle their own difficulties. It was none of his business and every man could kill his own snakes.

CHAPTER III

A JOB FOR A PUNCHER

IN the morning Jiggs said adios to Pinky, liking the man and yet not liking him, intrigued by the redhead's devil-may-care friendliness, and yet distrusting it. Pinky, bright-eyed and cheerful for all his nocturnal wanderings, pressed Jiggs to stay on at the Rocking Cross, but Jiggs made vague answers about wanting a job and having something lined up over east maybe. He took

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Quien Sabe down the canyon, deciding as he rode that the Cajas and all the Pinos Altos country was no place for Jiggs Maunday. There was a wide scope of country out ahead of him, and he'd hunt it.

Beyond the main range of the boxlike hills, the land fell away into smaller, piñon-covered ridges and draws—a veritable badlands—and Jiggs, striving to cut across these to save distance, found himself in a labyrinth. He could follow one brush-filled minor canyon and crown out its top only to encounter another. Once a box canyon fooled him completely and he followed up its course only to be confronted by a blank rock wall forming a cul-de-sac.

Retracing his course, heartily angry with himself for his predicament, he swung off to the east and sent Quien Sabe, grunting and reproachful, straight up the ridge. The tough grulla climbed like a cat and on the ridge top Jiggs paused to let the horse blow. He was engaged in the manufacture of a cigarette when, faint but distinct in the east, he heard cattle bawling. Unless all experience was at fault those were calves that he heard. Somebody was moving a bunch of stock, and Jiggs, anxious to get directions as to where and how to go, started Quien Sabe in the direction from which the sound came. Down that ridge he went and crossed the canyon and up another ridge, the sound growing stronger as he progressed.

In the second canyon Jiggs saw the cattle, a little bunch of calves, two riders bringing them along. He started down the long slope toward the riders when an amazing thing happened. One rider loped ahead, turning the lead calves right. They went into an opening in the piñons and simply vanished. Nor did they reappear among the piñons. Jiggs pulled Quien Sabe up short, shocked by this defiance of nature. Cattle didn't disappear like that—but they had.

One of the two men working the calves rode a bay horse and the other forked a bright sorrel. The man on the bay had turned the leaders and now he came back to join the man on the sorrel. Jiggs was in an open spot among the piñons on the side hill, and cattle and men were a good quarter of a mile away, far enough so that features could not be distinguished or horses or men identified, but not too far to see.

Jiggs was about to start Quien Sabe and go on down when the man on the bay horse dismounted. Jiggs could see him move, caught a glimpse of sunlight on steel, and then the shale at Quien Sabe's side spurted up, and flat across the piñons a rifle report spanked wickedly. That dismounted man was shooting at Jiggs Maunday and, for the distance, was doing right well. Gravel spurted up again. Quien Sabe came around on his hind feet and jumped his full length up the hill, and Jiggs, with no desire to be a target, bent down and ducked a pine branch. He had stumbled into something and it certainly wasn't an information booth.

Over the ridge top he pulled Quien Sabe out of the run but kept right on going. He wasn't wanted back there and the fact had been made evident. More, Jiggs knew why he wasn't wanted. Those calves were being taken into a hide-out, some small corral maufactured from brush and used, perhaps, a time or two. There the calves would be branded and held until weaned. There were certainly rustlers in the Cajas.

Jiggs scowled. He remembered that he had seen a bright sorrel horse

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in the bunch that Pinky Larrabee had run in that morning. But if the man on the sorrel was Pinky how had he gotten away over here, gathered cattle, and moved them? It would certainly take some riding! And if Pinky did his calf stealing in the daytime, why had he gone out during the night? Jiggs puzzled over these facts, finding no answer. He was roused from his preoccupation by the fact that Quien Sabe had found a trail.

THE trail went south, winding and twisting, following canyons, crossing ridges that grew less and less steep. Presently, with relief, Jiggs rode out of the piñons. He was on the flats. Behind him the Cajas towered above their brushy foothills. Jiggs turned east again, resolved that the thing for him to do was to put a whole lot of country back of him. Not that Jiggs was afraid; it was simply none of his business. A great hand for minding his own work, was Jiggs Maunday, and hanging around in a country where a stranger was run out of town because he drew a brand on a bar top and where men moving cattle shot at anyone coming toward them, did not, to Jiggs, come under the heading of a desirable occupation. He pushed along to the east.

An hour after he had cleared the piñon hills, Jiggs found the line camp. It was set in a fold of ground, corrals and a well flanking it, a saddled horse standing out in front and a team and buckboard drawn up beside the corral. Jiggs followed the trail on down to the camp. He still desired information and, if invited, he could use something to eat, for the time was noon. As he pulled Quien Sabe to a halt in front of the cabin a high-pitched, irascible voice came from the door.

"You say you rode yore line an' the bog, an' still you're in here by noon. I say it can't be done. Carl ain't in yet an' he's got a shorter ride than you got. I won't hire a man that slights his work."

Jiggs, one foot free of the stirrup, ready to dismount, put the foot back in place. Plainly somebody inside the cabin was being told off and it was no part of Jiggs' idea to butt in.

"Granddad!" Inside the cabin a girl spoke, remonstrating with the high-pitched voice.

That voice answered: "You keep out o' this, Bess. I say you're slightin' yore work, Nolen, an' that cattle are leakin' by you. You roll up yore bed an' git yore private horse. You're done on the TU."

"Lissen, you ol' snappin' turtle!" another voice took up the burden of the story. "You ain't firin' me. I've quit! I been wantin' to tell you for a long time. I wouldn't work for no outfit where a man uses a lantern for a bed an' where nothin' he does suits. If you wasn't so old I'd—"

"What'd you do?"

"I'll show you!"

There was the thud of a blow, an echoing thud as a man fell, and a scream from the girl. Jiggs came down off Quien Sabe, bringing the Winchester with him. Etiquette demanded that a man hold back when another man was being fired, but when a woman screamed all bets were coppered.

Arriving at the cabin door, Jiggs paused. An old man, billy-goat beard bristling, was slowly getting up from the floor and a very pretty girl, the stove poker in her hand, was advancing menacingly toward a stocky, swarthy individual who retreated before her. As Jiggs stepped inside, all motion ceased.

"Good mornin'," Jiggs said gently.

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That seemed to be a signal. The girl dropped the poker. The man with billy-goat beard jumped toward Jiggs, reaching for the Winchester, and the swarthy man took a swift step back and lifted his hand to the gun at his hip.

Jiggs fended off the old man with one long arm and, using the Winchester as another might use a Colt, cocked it and swung it level with the swarthy man's chest.

"I could beat you, friend," Jiggs drawled, still fending away the bearded man. "Don't try it."

"Give me that gun." The man with the whiskers strove earnestly against Jiggs' long left arm. "Give it to me. By—"

"I'm usin' it," Jiggs interrupted.

"Granddad!" the girl commanded.

Sanity returned to the blue eyes that glared at Jiggs. The beard still bristled, but its wearer retreated a step.

"Granddad!" the girl said again.

"I might've knowed you'd have a gunman cached outside, Toombs," the swarthy man growled.

Seemingly that reminded the bearded oldster of the business in hand. He wheeled. "I told you what to do, Nolen," he rasped. "Pull out. I'll give you yore time an' I'll send yore bed to Pinos Altos. Git!"

Jiggs was nodding. He didn't like Nolen's looks and he heartily agreed with Mr. Toombs.

Apparently Nolen took the nod for confirmation. "I'll go," he snarled. "Anyhow I got one lick at you. An' don't think I'm goin' to forget you. You neither!" He glared at Jiggs.

Jiggs gestured with the Winchester and moved from the door. "I'll go 'long whilst you saddle up," he drawled. "An' you won't need that gun to saddle a horse with. Better shuck it so Mr. Toombs can send it in with yore bed."

For a moment Frenchy Nolen hesitated. Then, under the influence of Jiggs' gray eyes and the muzzle of the Winchester, he moved his left hand toward the buckle of his gun belt. Jiggs watched narrowly.

"You won't need to hang it up," he drawled. "Just let her drop."

Belt and gun thumped to the floor. Nolen, scowling, strode to the door. As he went through, Jiggs fell in step a pace behind. He heard the girl say: "Did he hurt you, granddad? Did he?"

Frenchy Nolen wheeled about. "That's my horse in the pen," he rasped.

"Let's get him," suggested Jiggs.

Inside the cabin the girl came to her grandfather's side. Her hands went out but Toombs avoided them. One cheek was discolored from Nolen's blow, and the old man, suddenly weak, sat down on a box beside the table.

"He hurt you!" the girl exclaimed. "Granddad, let me—"

Toombs gestured her away. With a clawlike right hand he fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills. Counting off three, he thrust them at the girl.

"Give these to Nolen," he ordered. "I'm all right, girl. Let me alone."

Intuitively the girl did the right thing. A man who had been knocked down an old man with pride in him where bodily strength is gone, needs to be alone with his shame. Bess Toombs took the bills and, casting an apprehensive glance at her grandfather, hurried out of the cabin.

JIGGS was standing beside the corral watching Nolen catch his horse. He glanced at the girl as she hurried up and then looked back to

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Nolen again. Bess paused beside Jiggs.

"Give him this," she ordered, thrusting out the money. "I've got to go back. Granddad's hurt."

Jiggs accepted the bills. "I'll give 'em to him," he promised, and the girl turned and hurried to the cabin.

Inside the corral, Frenchy Nolen had caught his horse. When he finished saddling the animal, he led him out. Just at the gate Jiggs met the man and held out the money.

"Toombs sent it," he explained. "It's for you. Is that right?"

Nolen's face was sullen as he took the bills. "Thirty bucks," he snarled. "A month's wages. Anyhow I got in one lick on the old skunk. I took that out of him."

Jiggs' face brightened. "Oh, yeah," he drawled. "I pretty near forgot. He sent that back, too." Deliberately he leaned the Winchester against the corral, watching Nolen as he did so. The man's sullen face was puzzled. Jiggs' long-boned, broad left hand shot out and slapped lightly against Nolen's cheek. "Toombs sent that back," he added.

The puzzlement on Nolen's face changed to anger. Fists clenched, and, bellowing a curse, he charged. Jiggs flicked the left again, the hand clenched now, and then buried his right fist squarely in Nolen's belly, just where the ribs arched up to form the chest. All his wind gone, paralyzed by that blow in the plexus, Nolen staggered a step and sat down, mouth open as he gasped for the breath that would not come.

"Them last two," Jiggs informed him gently, "was on me. I don't like fellers that hit old men, even when the old man's got it comin'." Having parted with this sentiment, Jiggs picked up the Winchester and walked on back to the cabin door.

Old man Toombs was sitting at the table, looking sick, and the girl, Bess, was hovering anxiously about him. Jiggs saw at a glance what the trouble was. Toombs had been hit, not so hard physically as mentally, and he hadn't been able to hit back. Jiggs did what he could to rectify the trouble. He grinned and blew softly on the knuckles of his right hand. Noting the gesture, Toombs brightened.

"You mean you hit Nolen?" he demanded.

"Well," Jiggs returned, "he's sittin' down outside. Mebbe he stumbled over somethin'."

"Think I ain't able to take care of myse'f?" Toombs' beard began to bristle again, a sign of returning spirits.

"No. No, sir." Jiggs shook his head hastily and managed to look worried. Now Toombs' beard definitely was cocked, bristling and important as ever.

"That's a dang good thing," the old man rasped. "What's yore name an' what are you doin' here?"

"Jiggs Maunday. I was just passin' through."

"Hm-m-m." Toombs stroked the beard with his hand. Outside a saddle creaked and the sounds of a horse starting penetrated the cabin. Jiggs, glancing out the door, saw that Frenchy Nolen was riding off.

"Lookin' for work?" Toombs demanded.

Jiggs definitely wasn't looking for a job, not in this country, not right here. He started to say so and thought better of it. If he turned the old man down flat, it would be another jolt and Toombs had had enough jolts. So Jiggs equivocated. "I might take a job."

"Pay you thirty," Toombs stated. "I just fired a man."

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JIGGS shook his head. Thirty dollars was no wages and anyhow he didn't want to work in this country. "I couldn't work for thirty," he drawled. "I've seen sheepherders worth that."

"I suppose *you* set yorese'f up to be a cowhan'?" Toombs said scornfully.

"Well"—Jiggs' voice was mild—"I have punched a cow. I had two ahead of me at the same time, once."

"Likely!" Toombs' sniff was contemptuous. "I'll pay you thirty-five."

"Forty," Jiggs countered, before he thought.

"You're hired." Toombs wheeled toward his granddaughter. "Come on, Bess. We'll go home."

"Say, wait a minute." Jiggs, possessing a job that he didn't want, stopped his employer. "I ain't got a bed or nothin'. I can't take this job."

The bristling beard was thrust out toward him. "That's right, quit me in a tight," Toombs snarled. "I'll send you a bed from the ranch. Wagon'll be out tomorrow mornin' to take Nolen's truck to town. Carl will split his blankets with you tonight if you don't want to use Nolen's. An' see here, Maunday, I want you to do yore work an' no slackin' off. There's cattle bein' rustled in this country. It takes a tough hand to stick with a ridin' job. Come on, Bess." Again, he wheeled to the door.

"But—" Jiggs began.

"Ain't you tough enough?" Blue eyes met and locked with Jiggs'.

Somehow, meeting the challenge of that look, Jiggs grew angry. "I'm tough enough to hold down anythin' I've seen around here," he rasped.

The bristling beard bobbed. Were Toombs' lips grinning under the white mustachios? Jiggs couldn't say for sure.

"All right, tough hand," Toombs snapped. "Stick with it. Come on, Bess!" For the third time old man Toombs started to the door. This time he made it. Bess, pausing, smiled once at Jiggs, her teeth flashing and her eyes sparkling.

"Thanks," she said. "For—well, for everything."

"You goin' to keep me waitin' all day, Bess?" Old man Toombs' voice was as high and shrill and full of vinegar as it had been before he was hit. "An' you, Maunday—"

"Yes, sir?" Jiggs went to the door.

"You roll that bed of Nolen's an' throw it an' all his truck outside. You hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carl'll show you yore ride an' I'll be out to check up on you. All right, Bess?" The girl was settling herself in the buckboard seat beside her grandfather. "Geddap!"

The buckboard team started with a jump. Jiggs, one hand on the casing of the cabin door, watched the rig wheel away. "Danged old coot!" he growled. "He— Aw, hell!"

CHAPTER IV

RIDING FOR THE TU

CARL SISKIN was a slightly built blond youngster who listened silently and carefully to what Jiggs had to tell him. Siskin's bay horse stood by the corral where its rider had dismounted and Jiggs could see that the bay had covered country.

"So," Jiggs concluded, and there was some defiance in his voice, "I handed Nolen a couple. He'd hit the old man an' it looked to me like he had 'em comin'. I might have throwed in some interest." He watched Siskin narrowly as he spoke.

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Sometimes, when two men are together in a line camp they get to be such good friends that one will resent a blow given the other. Maybe Siskin would take up Frenchy Nolen's quarrel.

A smile broke over the blond puncher's face as Jiggs completed his statement.

"I tried to hand Nolen a little myself," Siskin drawled. "Trouble was that I run out of man before I got the job done. Frenchy's pretty handy with his fists. I'll lope out an' bring in the remuda. We got to keep up a wranglin' horse anyhow an' you might as well see what Frenchy's string looks like. You'll be usin' 'em from here on out."

Carl Siskin brought in twelve horses and penned them expertly. Jiggs closed the gate and moved across the corral. One thing about the TU—the outfit had good horses! All this bunch were solid-colored and all were young enough to have plenty of go and old enough to have some *sabe*. Jiggs liked the looks of the remuda. Siskin pointed out his own horses, everyone a bay. That left Jiggs the balance of the bunch—a black, a gray, two buckskins and two bays. One buckskin was kept up for a wrangling horse and the others turned out, Quien Sabe going with them.

"He's a warrior," Jiggs said of the grulla. "Either he'll be boss of the outfit by tomorrow mornin' or he'll be so scarred up he can't travel."

Siskin grinned. Jiggs was beginning to like the boy, to admire his open, friendly face and his assured air of competence.

"I'll stir up some supper," Siskin said.

"I'll get the wood an' water," Jiggs offered. "I know where they are. When I get the run of where you keep the grub I'll spell you with the cookin'. I ain't a bad *cocinero*."

The next day, true to his word, Frank Toombs sent a wagon to his Junction camp. In it was a bed for Jiggs, and the roustabout who drove the wagon had orders to pick up Nolen's possessions and take them on into Pinos Altos.

"I'm goin' to bring back a load of salt an' some supplies," the roustabout added. "Trust ol' Frank. A wagon never moves empty around the TU."

When the wagon was gone, Carl Siskin and Jiggs pulled out of camp. They went south, Siskin acting as guide and showing Jiggs the line that must be ridden. Siskin's own ride was to the northwest toward the Piñon Hills that marched like a black line along the higher reaches of the Cajas.

As they rode, Siskin, under Jiggs' questioning, loosened up. He had been with the TU for some four years, the blond puncher said. It was a good outfit.

"Old man Toombs can ride past at a lope an' tell you more things to do than you can get done in a week," Siskin confided. "But he's on the square an' he pays pretty good an' feeds a man all right. You'll notice that we've got fresh beef at camp. Toombs sent it out."

JIGGS continued to pry gently with his tongue and elicited more confidences. There was rustling in the country, all right, Siskin said, but he would go no further along that line, refusing to rise to Jiggs' somewhat pointed queries.

They saw cattle as they rode, a number of TU's that they turned back toward the east, and some Buckle-branded cattle that they gave a shove to the west. One Rocking Cross showed up and a few cows that carried a Screw Plate. Jiggs

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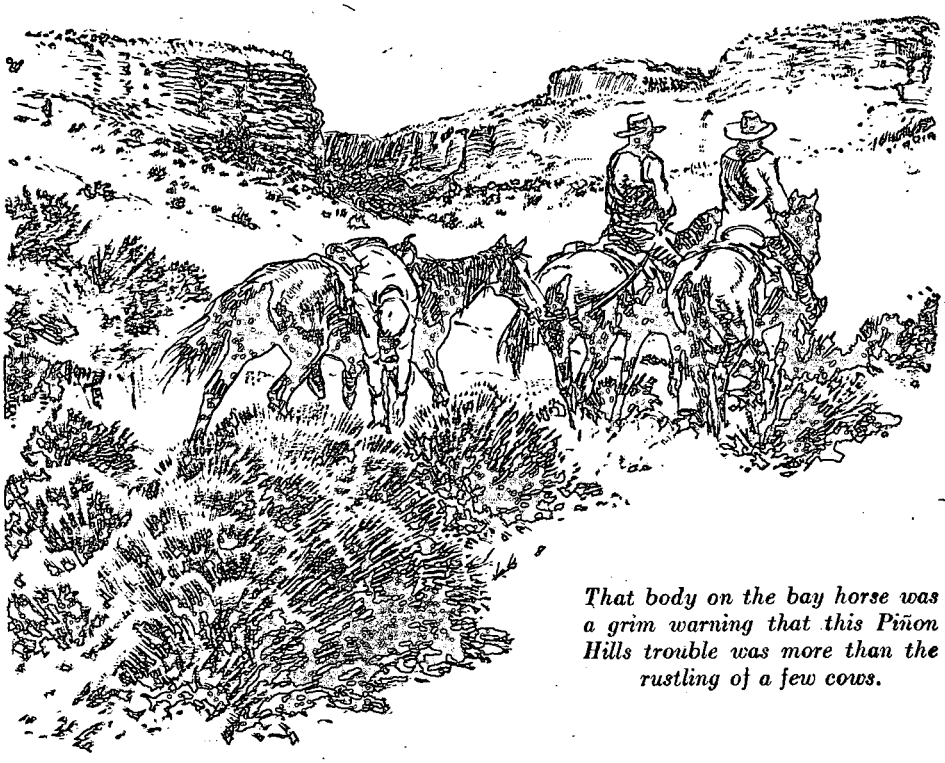

That body on the bay horse was a grim warning that this Piñon Hills trouble was more than the rustling of a few cows.

made a few edged comments about brands and how they could be changed, but Siskin ignored them. Only on the subject of the Screw Plate had he anything to say. The Screw Plate was an old brand in the country, and Jess Carmody, when he moved in, had bought the iron. That was all that Jiggs got from his companion on their ride.

They turned finally and rode back to the Junction camp. Jiggs now knew the limits of his ride and had a general idea of the country that lay south of the camp. But he didn't know much about how Carl Siskin felt, and particularly he had no idea as to Siskin's opinion of who was doing the rustling in the country. It was too much for Jiggs.

"Do you know Pinky Larrabee?" he asked suddenly as they rode along.

"I know him," Siskin answered. "He worked for Toombs awhile. Do you know Pinky?"

"I run into him," Jiggs answered, and proceeded briefly to relate the story of the steer and Pinos Altos. Siskin listened, laughed, and seemed a little more friendly.

"That's Pinky, all right," he said. "He wouldn't pass up a chance like that. He's always into somethin' or other."

"Seemed to be a pretty good sort of boy," drawled Jiggs.

"*I* like him," Siskin said. "He always treated me good. But he's not so popular around the country. If I was you I wouldn't tell Frank Toombs about stayin' overnight at Pinky's."

For just an instant Jiggs was tempted to speak of Pinky's absence during the night and to tell of the

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encounter he had had in the piñons. Then he changed his mind. Siskin said that he liked Pinky Larrabee all right. That was an item. Items two and three were that Jiggs had seen a bright sorrel horse in Larrabee's Rocking Cross corral and that Carl Siskin rode bay horses along his northern line. It just could be that Siskin was the man on the bay and Larrabee the man on the sorrel that were driving calves up in the piñons when Jiggs so inopportunely had come riding down. Jiggs glanced at Siskin's saddle. It was innocent of a weapon, but there was a saddle scabbard under the right fender. Once more Jiggs reminded himself of the old axiom: A man was given one mouth and two ears, a sign that he should listen twice as much as he talked.

When they reached the Junction camp, Siskin said that he was going to ride a piece of his line to the north. Jiggs offered to go along, but Siskin was not enthusiastic in his response.

"I'm just goin' a ways," he said. "You can stick around an' straighten up the house if you want to. I won't be gone long."

Jiggs could not well insist. He watched the blond rider disappear, and then went inside and, picking up the broom, began to sweep the dirt floor. It was, Jiggs told himself, queer that Siskin had refused his company. Mighty queer.

Putting the broom down, Jiggs seated himself on his newly acquired bed. He was working for the TU. Ought he or ought he not tell old Frank Toombs about the calves in Piñon Hills and the men that handled them? Glaring at the broom, Jiggs debated the question. Then, rising, he shook his head. He didn't know enough; not yet. He hadn't enough to go on, and if he told Toombs and mentioned that sorrel horse, he might be putting Pinky Larrabee on a spot. Maybe Pinky deserved to be on a spot and maybe he didn't. Jiggs couldn't say for sure.

FOR two days after his employment Jiggs rode his line. There was a piece of bog along a creek that needed watching and there were always a few cattle to throw back into their own country. On the third day, coming in from his ride, Jiggs found Toombs and Bess in camp waiting for him. Siskin was already in, and while Toombs talked to Jiggs, the blond cowboy and the girl drew apart and held their own conversation.

Toombs had been to Pinos Altos and had heard something of Jiggs' escapade there. He asked questions that Jiggs answered frankly. It seemed to Jiggs that the cowman was worried. Even when Jiggs recounted the story of the roan steer, Toombs did no more than grin.

"You just didn't know how things were," the TU owner said when Jiggs had finished. "You done the wrong thing when you showed the bartender how you could make a Buckle from the TU."

"I kind of figured that out afterward," Jiggs answered ruefully.

Toombs was silent for a long moment. "Pinky Larrabee used to work for me," he said, suddenly breaking the silence. "He was a good hand. I used him for a straw boss. Then he quit an' went over to his place in the Cajas. He brands a Rockin' Cross. The TU could be run into that, you know."

"It could." Jiggs' voice showed nothing of his thoughts.

Toombs eyed him narrowly. "Larrabee," he announced, "has got orders to stay off the TU."

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Jiggs made no comment. Toombs continued and now his worry was plain. "I'm losin' calves. We've been findin' wet cows that ain't got a calf followin' 'em, cows that had big calves when we branded. Have you seen any like that?"

"No," Jiggs answered truthfully. "I'd have reported if I had." Then widening a little on his statement: "When a man hires me I work for him, not for somebody else. Right now I work for you."

"I sized you up that way," Toombs said, satisfaction in his voice. "I don't like to think I'm mistaken about a man."

Somebody had been working on Frank Toombs. Carmody probably, or Carmody's foreman, Nick Rice. Jiggs surmised the fact. His eyes narrowed and his voice hardened.

"You been told some things," he drawled. "I don't hold with a man talkin' about another unless both of 'em are right there. If you got any doubts about me, Mr. Toombs, it won't take me ten minutes to run in my horse an' leave."

"An' where would you go?" Toombs queried gently.

"I'd likely make Pinos Altos before I left the country," replied Jiggs.

Toombs' eyes were bright as he looked at Jiggs. "Yore horse is doin' right well in this pasture," he commented. "You'd better keep him there. I knew I'd sized you up when I hired you." He turned abruptly and, with Jiggs following, walked over to where Bess and Carl Siskin stood.

"There's a quarter of beef in the buckboard, Carl," Toombs announced. "You'd better get it out an' hang it in yore meat house. How are you fixed for flour?"

"We got plenty," Siskin answered, "but if yo're goin' to town we could use some bakin' powder."

"I'll get it. Anythin' else?"

"I been out of smokin' tobacco for a day," Jiggs stated. "If I could draw against my wages, I'd ask you to bring me a carton of Bull Durham. I'm broke."

"I'll bring it. Anythin' else?"

Both TU riders shook their heads. Toombs nodded to Bess. "We'll go on then," he announced. "I'll have the bakin' powder an' the tobacco with me when I come back tomorrow. I'll leave 'em."

He walked to the buckboard. Jiggs and Carl Siskin followed to get the quarter of beef.

"You won't forget, Carl?" Bess asked as she climbed into the buckboard.

"I sure won't, Bess," Siskin answered from the tailgate. "Here. I'll take the beef, Jiggs."

WHEN Toombs and his granddaughter drove away, Jiggs followed them with his eyes. Old Frank Toombs might bristle with his beard and rant around and act as though his coat tails were afire, but under all the smoke he was solid as bedrock. A sort of affection for the old man arose in Jiggs' mind. Toombs was worried, he was losing calves and he was crowded, but when he hired a man—even an utter stranger like Jiggs Maunday—he stayed with him. Carmody and Rice and likely the sheriff had put the pressure on Frank Toombs concerning Jiggs Maunday, but Toombs had stood right up to them.

"A pretty good old man," Jiggs said aloud.

Siskin, returning from the meat house, heard the words.

"You bet he is," he agreed.

Jiggs looked at his camp partner. Now what was it that Bess had told Carl Siskin not to forget? Jiggs'

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natural curiosity asked the question and his common sense shrugged it off. Evidently it was none of his business.

For three more days Jiggs kept steadily at his job, riding bog and line, keeping things in shape, looking after cattle. He left the Junction camp about five o'clock and he rarely returned before three or four in the afternoon. Then, one evening, cutting his ride short, he pulled in to the camp about two in the afternoon.

Just why he did it, Jiggs could not have explained, but with some time to spare, he saddled a fresh horse and rode to to meet Carl Siskin. Carl was coming out of the roughs at the edge of the Piñon Hills when Jiggs spotted him. The blond man rode steadily, as though with some purpose in mind. Jiggs, identifying horse and rider by posture and color because he was too far away to see Siskin's face, waited for his camp mate.

Siskin came along and then, for no cause discernible to Jiggs, halted and sat his bay, waiting. Another rider came out of the hills and joined Siskin. They talked for a moment and then both rode back to the piñons together. Jiggs did not follow, but turned his horse and headed back to camp. That man who had come from the Piñon Hills was Pinky Larrabee, Jiggs was sure. And Pinky Larrabee had been warned off the TU and told to keep away.

CHAPTER V

MURDER IN THE PINONS

ON the day following the meeting between Pinky Larrabee and Carl Siskin, Jiggs Maunday started out just as usual in the morning. He rode off toward the south and Siskin went northwest. Jiggs did not dare neglect his little piece of bog, but he rode it at a lope. That finished, he let the rest of his ride go and, crossing the creek, went due west. He covered country, keeping his buckskin horse, Smoky, at it steadily. The buckskin was the best horse in Jiggs' string, always excepting Quien Sabe, and Jiggs had chosen the horse with this particular job in mind.

"I won't ride you for two weeks, Smoky," he promised, "but yo're sure goin' to be rode today."

Five miles west of the creek crossing Jiggs turned north and headed straight for the Piñon Hills. That chopped-up labyrinth of brush, rock and piñon growth intrigued him mightily. Jiggs pushed Smoky along, watchful all the time, careful to pick country that would conceal him, and keeping off the skyline. He wanted to find the trail that Quien Sabe had followed out of the Piñon Hills. From that trail he believed he could locate the blind box canyon, and from the box canyon he knew that he could find the ridge upon which he had stopped and watched the calves disappear. There was a mystery that Jiggs Maunday intended to clear up. At the time it had not been his business, but now that he rode for the TU, conditions were changed. Jiggs pushed along and presently reached the beginning of the roughs and the piñon growth.

Twice he struck false leads, believing that he had found his trail, only to realize that he was mistaken. The wasted time irked him, but he had patience and kept on trying. Once, working along a bench, he thought he heard a shot, and stopped Smoky to listen. The sound was not repeated and Jiggs rode on. Finally he found the trail and, following it, came to a maze of twisting canyons and the crooked ridges

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that separated them. Turning east now, he crossed two canyons and then, stopping, identified his position. He was again on the slope down which he had looked when he saw the calves!

Carefully, using brush and piñons for a screen, Jiggs worked down to the canyon bottom. He had marked his course and in the canyon went along until he believed that he had reached the place where the calves turned. Swinging to the right, he pushed into an opening among the piñons, and there, in front of him, was the explanation for the phenomenon of the calves' disappearance. A side canyon, small and steep-sided, was directly ahead. Jiggs slid the Winchester from his saddle scabbard and rode along.

The canyon ended in a blind alley. The sides opened out and made a little park, and at the end of the park was a corral. Someone had packed wire into this lonesome spot and, twisting it around brush, stringing it from piñon to scrub pine, had made a pen. The center of the pen had been cleared of the scrubby growth, and the brush carried to the wire and added to it. The pen was not more than ten yards across. Reconnoitering carefully first, Jiggs rode in.

THERE was nothing in the brush corral. The gate, of wire, had been laid back against the fence and there was plenty of sign, but the calves that had made the sign were not there. Smoky worked his ears back and forth and, suddenly, nickered. Jiggs tried to stop the horse but he was too late. From north of the corral Smoky's signal was answered.

This, Jiggs told himself, was not so good. In fact, it was plenty bad. He got away from the front of the corral, urging Smoky back into the piñons and brush. Nothing happened, no shot, no call, nothing. Only, to the north, Smoky's friend nickered again.

That wasn't reasonable. The men who used this brush corral were not the kind to repeat a mistake. Either that was a loose horse up there or else— Jiggs, Winchester cocked and resting across his arm, pushed along to see what else.

The horse was in a little opening not fifty yards from the corral. It was a bay and the saddle rope was down, dragging from the horn, the end fouled in a crack between rocks. Jiggs needed only one look to identify horse and saddle. Riding up to the animal, he stopped.

Smoky, ears working, gazed off to the left and there, from under a piñon, Jiggs saw a pair of boots protruding. Instantly he dismounted, dropping his reins and so leaving the buckskin anchored. Six hasty steps brought him to the boots.

For just an instant Jiggs stood and then, leaning the Winchester against a piñon, knelt down. Carl Siskin lay on the gravel beside the piñon and the blond puncher was dead. There was blood on his shirt and on the gravel, and in the center of the bloody spot there was a hole, just above the heart.

Leaving the body, Jiggs examined the site, working around it carefully on foot, trying not to destroy any tracks. There was not much sign. The bay horse had worked back and forth on the end of his rope, marring any tracks that might have been in the clearing. But round the body itself the gravel was shifted and moved as though a man had tramped it.

Face grim, Jiggs went to Smoky and, mounting, struck out over the ridge to the east, threading his way,

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picking a trail. On top of the ridge Jiggs looked back and then up to the sky. There, above him, sweeping in slow circles, was a buzzard. Mechanically, his voice hoarse with anger, Jiggs cursed the bird and then struck on down from the ridge top, straight as the terrain would let him go, toward the east.

It took a while to get out of the piñons. Jiggs' shirt was torn, his Levi overalls ripped and his boots scarred anew before he finally came to the flats. He was north of the Junction camp and for just an instant he debated. Smoky had covered a lot of country and the time spent in catching a fresh horse might be profitable. Jiggs turned right and struck for the Junction.

He had the horses in the pen and was saddling Quien Sabe when Frank Toombs and a hard-faced oldster from the TU headquarters came riding in to the camp. The man with Toombs was Sandy Erickson and snuff bulged his upper lip as he and Toombs listened to what Jiggs had to say.

Toombs asked one curt question: "How long has he been dead?"

"Not long. He wasn't stiff when I found him."

"Can you go straight back to where you found him?"

"I ought to be able to. I made a trail wide enough for a wagon road comin' out."

Toombs wheeled to Erickson. "You strike for the ranch. Get the wagon out here to the camp. Juan can bring it. Get whatever men are at the place an' send 'em ahead of the wagon. Send word into town an' get the sheriff out here. Maunday an' me'll go up there. If we ain't here when you come back, follow along our tracks."

Without a question, Erickson straddled his horse and struck off at a lope toward headquarters. Toombs turned to Jiggs.

"His horse is there, you say?" he demanded.

"He's there."

"We can bring Siskin out on that horse," Toombs decided. "Catch me somethin' to ride. My horse ain't fresh. Then we'll go."

As they rode back northwest, Jiggs talked and Frank Toombs listened. Jiggs spoke of the men he had seen driving calves, of the sorrel horse and the bay horse, and of the shots that had been sent at him when he stopped on the ridge. He mentioned the meeting between Pinky Larrabee and Carl Siskin that he had witnessed.

"I should've told you," Jiggs said bitterly. "Instead, I went ridin' off this mornin' looking for what I could find. Some way I just couldn't believe that Carl an' Larrabee was mixed up in stealin'. I had to go off my myse'f to find out."

Old Frank Toombs' eyes were keen. "I can't believe it, neither," he said frankly. "I've had Carl for four years an' there never was a steadier, better boy. But from what you say— Yeah, you should've told me."

When they reached the clearing in which Carl Siskin's body lay, the buzzard had lighted. The big bird hopped awkwardly away and took to the air. Jiggs breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the buzzard had not worked up courage to tackle the body.

Frank Toombs looked around, his old eyes keen. "Had his rope down," he rasped. "Must've been workin' on somethin'. Where's this corral you said was here?"

Jiggs showed Toombs the corral. They examined it. Against one side the black charcoal and ashes of a

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dead fire showed. Calves had been branded in the corral. Jiggs, scouting, came across a piece of rope, the hondo broken through. The rope had been cut off so that its owner could bend a fresh hondo in the end.

Farther along the fence Jiggs came to a place where a horse had backed into it. Probably a rope horse, pulling on a calf, holding the rope tight. There were horse hairs caught in the brush, quite a little bunch of hair. Detaching the hair, Jiggs looked at it. The color was sorrel.

Mechanically Jiggs rolled the hair around his fingers and put the coil in the pocket of his shirt, under his tobacco sack. No need mentioning this. The case against Pinky Larrabee was bad enough now.

"They had calves in here," Toombs growled. "Likely they had some argument. Carl took down his rope to catch a calf an' Larrabee shot him. Then Larrabee opened the gate an' drove the calves off. Or mebbe they was drivin' 'em when Carl was shot. Carl's gun is still in his holster an' the die down's on the hammer. He wasn't expectin' trouble." The cowman's voice was bitter.

"Then where's the trail?" Jiggs asked. "There ain't any trail away from the gate to show where the calves went."

Toombs scowled. "Mebbe Larrabee got scared after he'd shot Carl an' just turned the calves loose," he countered Jiggs' question. "We can't do no more here. We'll take Carl back to the camp."

They loaded Siskin's body across the saddle of the bay horse, lashing it there with the saddle rope. Then, with a last look at the pen and the clearing, the two started east, Jiggs leading the bay. The sun was well in the west now, slanting down to sit on top of the Cajas. Siskin's head and feet bumped limply on either side of the horse.

"I can't believe it," Toombs said suddenly. "I just can't believe it."

DUSK was upon them when they came to the Junction camp. Juan, the TU roustabout, was coming along the road with the wagon, and Sandy Erickson and two more TU riders stood in front of the cabin. There was no talk as the rope was unlashed and the body unloaded.

"I sent Dutch into town for the sheriff," Erickson reported to Frank Toombs. "I found him about five miles this side of headquarters an' he went right in."

"Good," Toombs approved, and then, scanning his men with hard blue eyes: "It looks like we've found our rustlers. Siskin an' Larrabee. Maunday, you tell the boys."

Jiggs repeated the facts that he had told Toombs. Only Erickson made comment when Jiggs finished.

"You might've spoke out before, Maunday, an' saved some grief."

"I know it," Jiggs answered sobely.

They waited then, the TU men talking in low voices, Jiggs withdrawn from them, off to himself, thinking. Dark came and then the sound of traveling horses coming from the west.

The newcomers were Dutch, the man dispatched to Pinos Altos, Sheriff Henry Ward, Jess Carmody, smooth and immaculate as always, and a lanky elderly man that the others called Turner. This was, Jiggs judged, the undersheriff, Turner Bright, to whom Pinky had referred. Toombs did the talking while Ward asked questions. Carmody explained his presence smoothly.

"The Piñon Hills border on my country and I was in town when

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your man came in, Toombs. Naturally I came along."

"It was Larrabee, all right," Ward growled when Toombs had finished. "No doubt of it. Him an' Siskin was stealin' yore cattle, Toombs, an' they had a fallin' out."

"So," Toombs growled, "what do you want to do about it, Ward?"

The Sheriff thought ponderously. "We'll head for Larrabee's," he decided. "Right now. We'll catch him while he's asleep."

No one offered any objection to the scheme. They all mounted, and Toombs gave orders to Juan.

"You take Carl to Pinos Altos," he commanded. "Tell the undertaker I'll stand the bills. Mebbe Siskin *was* stealin' my calves, but he worked for the TU an' I'll bury him."

TWO hours after the posse left the Junction, they reached the Rocking Cross. They had come right along, avoiding the traps of the Piñon Hills that Jiggs had formerly encountered. The moon bathed the Rocking Cross Canyon and Pinky Larrabee's house. The men dismounted well below the house and, moving cautiously, surrounded the place while Ward and Turner Bright went in. Both men came out immediately. Pinky Larrabee was not at home.

"Out stealin' some more of my calves likely," Toombs grated.

After a brief counsel of war a decision was reached. The thing to do was to wait, surround the house, keep hidden and watch for Larrabee's return.

"He'll came back," Dutch prophesied. "He won't know we're lookin' for him an' he'll show up." The others were agreed on that point. Each chose a place of concealment and waited.

Jiggs, with Frank Toombs, was joined by Carmody. The two ranchers drew apart from him and talked in low tones. Once or twice they glanced in his direction and Jiggs knew that he was the subject of their talk.

The moon traveled on toward the west, and Carmody and Toombs quit talking. Then rock rattled down the canyon. There was stillness followed by the scuffling sound that a horse makes when he strikes gravel that rolls underfoot. Pinky Larrabee was coming.

He came into sight, his horse nervous, sensing the alien presence of the hidden watchers. Jiggs saw Pinky stop his mount and search the canyon and the surroundings of the house, turning his head slowly as he looked. Then, suddenly, the rider swung his horse and lifted the animal with his spurs. Something had been out of place, some movement, some carelessness had betrayed the presence of the posse.

Turning his head, Jiggs caught a silvery gleam. Jess Carmody had a gun in his hand, a nickel-plated gun. As Pinky's horse leaped ahead, that gun exploded, flame ringing the muzzle. Into Jiggs' mind the thought flashed that Carmody hadn't meant to give Pinky any chance at all. There had been no warning call, no demand that Pinky give up. The nickel-plated gun had meant death if Carmody could deal it. The shot had shattered the quiet of the night. Men shouted and ran for their horses. Ward was bellowing: "Surrender, Larrabee! Surrender! This is the law!"

Other guns echoed the noise of Carmody's. All useless. Pinky Larrabee was lost among the trees, in the dark shadow patterned on the canyon side. Jiggs, up on Quien Sabe, pulled the horse down and

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stopped while the rest of the posse clattered past him. It was no use to chase Pinky Larrabee, not at night, with the moonlight playing tricks and with the timber for a hunted man to dodge through, and the hidden breaks to the Piñon Hills lying close. Quien Sabe fought his head and wanted to go, but Jiggs held him.

"Save yore strength," he told the grulla grimly. "You'll need it."

Dutch was the first of the pursuers to return. He was disgusted as he joined Jiggs.

"Larrabee hit for the piñons," he grunted. "He smashed 'em an' then turned some way. I lost him after he hit the trees so I come back. The rest of 'em are out there playin' tag, chasin' each other. There ain't no use of goin' on tonight. Wait till mornin', I say."

Erickson joined Dutch and Jiggs. Then old Frank Toombs, horse blowing softly, came riding up. Turner Bright, the undersheriff, made his appearance.

"One thing," Dutch stated, "is certain. It was Larrabee that killed Carl. Else why did he run?"

Yes, Jiggs Maunday thought. Else why?

CHAPTER VI

RANGE DETECTIVE

THEY didn't catch Pinky Larrabee. Posses scoured the country, working through the Piñon Hills, and there was a constant guard at the Rocking Cross, but Larrabee remained free. He had friends in the hills; native families who remembered old Bill Larrabee and who shielded his son. And Pinky knew the country, none better. It seemed that the Cajas had simply opened and swallowed the red-headed man.

Jiggs went into the piñons with the posse and they combed the hills as best they could. With the brush corral as a starting point, they worked west and north and clear to the Rocking Cross. The magnitude of the job was appalling. The Piñon Hills led to the Cajas and the Cajas were a hundred miles long and, counting the foothills, at least fifty wide. They were rough and broken and chopped into a myriad of canyons and ridges. In that country a man might hide forever and a little bunch of cattle would be lost. Still a careful systematic search should have uncovered the brush corral that Jiggs had stumbled upon and he commented to Dutch concerning the fact.

"It looks like," Jiggs said, "that with the calves bein' stolen, Ward would have looked into the hills before all this happened. Or if he didn't, you'd think that Toombs would have made a try at 'em."

Dutch grunted. "Ward's a fat politician," he said. "All he wants is the salary an' the graft he gets bein' sheriff. He ain't lookin' for work. An' old Frank had it in his head that Pinky was the man stealin' from him. He kept watchin' Pinky an' never caught him. No wonder. Carl was supposed to keep an eye on Pinky when he rode the north line. Instead of that, Carl threw in with him."

The search was interrupted by the funeral of Carl Siskin. A coroner's jury sitting on the case brought in a verdict. It seemed apparent to the jury that Carl Siskin had been killed by William Larrabee and they so reported. Then, after the inquest, Siskin was buried in the Pinos Altos cemetery, the whole countryside attending. Despite the fact that men believed Siskin had been involved in rustling from his employer

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he had friends who could not forget him.

After the funeral things quieted down. Cowmen have cattle to look after and merchants have stores, and it is the law's business to hunt murderers and thieves. Jiggs went back to the Junction camp where Dutch was now his partner. Then, a full ten days after the funeral, Frank Toombs arrived at the camp before Dutch and Jiggs had left on the day's ride. Bess was with her grandfather in the buckboard. Toombs wanted Jiggs to go to Pinos Altos.

"Get yore horse an' come on," the cowman ordered, and Jiggs, filled with curiosity, obeyed.

IN Pinos Altos, loafing in the Home Ranch, Jiggs learned why Frank Toombs had come to town. The cowmen of Pinos County were holding a meeting, the bartender said. They intended to do something about catching Larrabee. That explained Toombs' presence, but it didn't tell Jiggs why the old man wanted him along.

The meeting lasted three hours

Pinky Larrabee appeared and Carmody lifted his gun—he didn't mean to give Pinky any chance at all!

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and at its end Toombs hunted Jiggs. "You ride back in the buckboard," he instructed. "We'll get Bess an' pull out." His face was black as a thundercloud over the Cajas.

Obediently Jiggs tied his horse to the hames of the off horse of the buckboard team and climbed into the seat. Toombs drove around the block and stopped at a dwelling where Bess visited with a friend. While the old man was in the house, Jiggs sat, holding the lines and wondering as to his presence here in Pinos Altos. It had certainly not been necessary for him to come to town. All he had done was loaf.

Toombs and Bess came out and the girl climbed up to sit next to Jiggs. Toombs took the lines and the buckboard rattled out of town. They were half a mile along the east road before Toombs spoke.

"We formed the Pinos County Anticowthief Association," he announced. "Carmody's president an' I'm secretary. We hired Nick Rice to ride for us."

Jiggs said nothing. He had seen Carmody and Rice in town and the Home Ranch bartender had identified other men, strangers to Jiggs, as cowmen from the south side and the west side of Pinos County.

"What do you think of that?" Toombs demanded.

"Sometimes associations like that work," Jiggs answered noncommittally.

"Sometimes!" Toombs made an epithet of the word. "I knew what what was goin' to happen. That's why I brought you to town. I wanted you to ride for the Association. They wouldn't have it. Said that they didn't know nothin' about you." Frank Toombs paused. His blue eyes were keen and searching. "Who are you, Maunday, an' where'd you come from?"

Toombs had a right to ask that question. "Out of Mexico," Jiggs answered. "I worked for the Yeagers down there. Before that, I'd worked for 'em in Texas. I was foreman for the Seven Up an' Seven Down when the two Yeager boys were killed."

"Maunday!" Toombs exploded. "Damn it, I knew I'd heard that name! You're the man that tangled with the Real bunch down there. I heard about that, only the feller that was tellin' the story kept callin' you Monday, like you was a day of the week."

"Sometimes," Jiggs drawled, "names are right confusin'."

Bess was looking searchingly at Jiggs, her face pale.

"So that's who you are," Toombs said thoughtfully. He looked at Jiggs, his beard bristling almost in Bess' face. "I want you to do a job for me. I want you to drop everythin' an' hunt Larrabee. I want him caught!"

Jiggs could feel Bess' shudder. "The Association—" Jiggs began.

"The Association hired Nick Rice. I don't trust him. I want you to take it up, Maunday. From what I heard, you're good at followin' a man!"

Toombs' voice was grim. He was thinking of that long trail down in Mexico, the long search that Jiggs had made for the men who killed the Yeagers, and doubtless he was thinking of the grisly outcome of that hunt. Jiggs was remembering it, too. He shook his head.

"I want no more of that," he said slowly. "That's why I left Mexico. I'd had enough."

HE met Frank Toombs' eyes squarely, his own gray eyes level and direct. Toombs was the first to look away. He knew that

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Jiggs Maunday was not afraid, but that he was weary and that he did not want, ever again, to look through the smoke of a gun at a man on the ground.

"An'," Jiggs added, "I like Pinky Larrabee. He sided me one time. Maybe he killed Carl an' maybe he didn't. It looks like he did. Mebbe he stole yore calves. But somehow I can't believe that he done them things." Again Jiggs stared at Toombs and the old man met his look.

"If that don't suit you," Jiggs added, "I can pull out."

For the first time since Jiggs had known him, indecision clouded Toombs' eyes. The bristling beard was not belligerent but seemed to droop.

"You know it was Larrabee," Toombs said. "So do I. The coroner's jury—"

"Juries have been mistaken," reminded Jiggs.

"I want the man that killed Carl an' that's been stealin' my cattle," Toombs blurted. The beard bristled again and the indecision was gone from his eyes. "I don't give a hoot who he is; I want him caught!"

Surprisingly Bess Toombs spoke. "I own part of the TU," she said. "Won't you take the job, Jiggs?"

Surprised, Jiggs looked at the girl. Her eyes were steady as she met his.

"Why—" Jiggs began.

"I'll pay you a hundred dollars a month," Toombs cut in. "That's fightin' wages, an' I'll match this reward that the Association's offerin'."

"You want the man that killed Carl Siskin," Jiggs said slowly, still looking at Bess Toombs. "An' you want the man that's stealin' yore calves. It don't make any difference if it's Pinky or who it is. That right?"

The girl nodded. She did not lower her eyes.

"Then"—Jiggs looked squarely at Toombs—"I'll take the job. An' I draw forty dollars a month while I work for the TU. I don't take blood money. You're goin' by the Junction camp, ain't you? I'll drop off there."

"By glory!" Frank Toombs rapped. "I knew you'd take it. Now I'll show Carmody an' them some action. I didn't want Rice in the first place. I wanted you."

When they reached the Junction camp, Dutch was waiting and had some questions to ask Toombs concerning the work. For a moment Bess and Jiggs were alone together.

Jiggs looked at the girl. "Why did you want me to take this job? Do you want me to catch Pinky? I ain't goin' to lay down on it, you know."

Bess met his look steadily. "I want you to find the man who killed Carl," she answered. "It wasn't Pinky. I know."

"How do you know?" Jiggs demanded.

Now the direct blue eyes that met his were lowered momentarily. When the girl lifted her lashes again, her eyes were bright. "Because I do," she said enigmatically. "I've got to talk to you, Jiggs. Will you come to the ranch?"

Frank Toombs came back to the buckboard. "Are you goin' to stop here, Maunday?" he asked. "I've got to get on home before dark."

"I'll go to the ranch," Jiggs answered easily. "There's some things I want to know. An' I want to plan a little."

"All right." Toombs seemed surprised. "Come along then." He turned to Dutch. "You'll have to

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hold the camp down until I get somebody," he announced.

"I can swing it," Dutch assured him.

THAT night at the TU headquarters Jiggs and Frank Toombs sat on the gallery and talked. Toombs spoke bitterly of Pinky Larrabee, telling Jiggs how Pinky had worked for him and why the redhead had quit.

"He wanted to marry Bess," Toombs said. "I was payin' him good wages, but I couldn't see Bess marryin' a cowhand, an' I told Larrabee so. He got mad. I was just as reasonable as could be, but he flew off the handle."

The darkness hid Jigg's grin. He had a mental picture of Frank Toombs being reasonable.

"The up of it was that he quit. He told me he'd have as many cows as I had in a couple of years an' he'd show me. An' right after he quit I begun to lose cattle. I lost a wad of two-year-old heifers that I'd saved for replacements, an' Pinky turned up, just as bold as brass, with some heifers. Told around that he'd bought 'em with some money his aunt left him, but we never could find where he'd bought 'em or who he'd bought 'em from."

"Rustlin'," Jiggs said gravely, "is hard to prove on a man. You've got to catch him with the goods."

"That's right," Toombs agreed. "We never could catch Pinky."

"Did you ever," drawled Jiggs, "look at anybody else for yore cow thief? Carmody, say? The TU runs into a Buckle right nice an' easy."

"What would Carmody want to steal for?" Toombs countered. "He's got three thousand head of cows. He couldn't afford to steal."

Blind, Jiggs thought. Old Frank Toombs was blind. Three thousand head of cows were plenty of cows, but their possession would not keep a man from wanting more. Toombs, like most cowmen, had made up his mind. Pinky Larrabee had tried to take Bess from her grandfather and the two men had quarreled. What was more natural then, that Toombs, when he lost calves, should conclude that Larrabee was the man who had taken them? And once he had made up his mind, nothing would change it. Jiggs stretched and yawned.

"If I'm goin' to catch yore cow thief I'd better get some sleep," he announced. "I expect I'll hunt the bunkhouse."

Jiggs did not go at once to the bunkhouse. He waited, back of Toombs' dwelling, sure that Bess would appear. The lights in the house went out and Jiggs had almost given up when a soft voice came through the dark. "Jiggs?"

"Here."

The girl came up, put her hand on his arm and led him toward the corrals. There, beside the fence, she stopped.

"Well?" Jiggs said.

"I haven't much time." Bess' voice was soft and hurried. "But I had to tell you. Carl and Pinky were trying to catch the Buckle stealing granddad's calves. They were working together. They knew about that corral where Carl was killed. And Pinky was coming to see me. I'd send him notes by Carl and then we'd meet at night. I saw him the day that Carl was killed. I suppose that's why Pinky wasn't with Carl. He was riding to see me."

"Then why didn't you speak up?" Jiggs demanded sharply. "Why didn't you say so?"

The girl's voice was unsteady. "At first I was afraid," she answered. "I meant to and then I just couldn't.

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I was afraid of what it would do to granddad if he learned that I'd been meeting Pinky—" For a moment Bess paused, then her voice went on. "I told Pinky that I was going to tell and he said—"

"You've seen Pinky?" Jiggs interrupted incredulously.

In the darkness he could feel rather than see her nod. "He's hiding in the piñons," she answered. "Narciso Sandoval and his brother are feeding him. I—Carl used to leave my notes with Narciso and Pinky would get them. I gave Narciso a note and Pinky and I met. We talked about what we should do. Pinky says that I'm not to tell that he was with me. He says that if everybody is hunting him, the Buckle will get careless and he'll be able to catch them stealing. He says that it's Jess Carmody and Nick Rice. You've got to help Pinky and me, Jiggs."

"I've got to talk to Pinky," Jiggs declared. "Look, Bess, the moon's comin' up an' we can't stay here. Somebody might see us. Will you write a note to Pinky tellin' him to trust me an' to meet me at Sandoval's? I've got to talk to him."

"I'll give it to you in the morning," the girl promised. "You will help us, Jiggs?"

"I'll help," Jiggs told her. "I hired out to catch the man that killed Carl Siskin an' I'm goin' to do it."

The moon, not so big now, one side flattened, came sliding its rim over the eastern horizon. Bess Toombs put her hand on Jiggs' arm. "I've got to trust you," she said. "Pinky and I both have to trust you."

She was gone, swiftly, back toward the house. Beside the corral Jiggs rolled a cigarette and felt for a match. Then, remembering, he walked away from the pens. He was at the door of the bunkhouse before he lit his smoke.

CHAPTER VII

ARREST

THE Sandovals lived in a shack perhaps fifteen miles from the Junction camp and a good twelve miles from the TU headquarters. Here, where the Piñon Hills formed a long protruberance into the flats, they had located. There was a small creek for water and there was plenty of brush and browse for the goats that were the mainstay of the Sandovals' existence. Jiggs, riding in at about eight o'clock, left Bess Toombs' note with Narciso Sandoval. He talked with Narciso, glad to use Spanish again. If there was an answer, Jiggs said, he would be back past the goat ranch later that day; or, in case no answer had come when he returned, he could always be found at the Junction camp. Narciso stared at Jiggs, blank-eyed. No one, Jiggs knew, could hide emotion better than a native. But Narciso had got the drift of things all right.

Leaving the goat ranch, Jiggs went on into the hills, striking a direct course for the brush corral. He was wasting time, perhaps, and yet there might be something at the corral, some clue, some minor detail that would help. Jiggs thought, just as Pinky Larrabee thought, just as Carl Siskin had thought, that the Buckle was the outfit rustling TU calves. He believed, too, that a Buckle man had been back of the gun that killed Carl Siskin. But which man that rode for the Buckle brand? A question to be answered, if possible.

The corral was just as he had formerly found it, the calf droppings

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old now, the tracks obliterated or made faint by a shower or two that had fallen. Jiggs scouted around the pen and, presently, found again the piece of rope with the broken hondo knot. Examining the rope, he was struck by an idea and went back to his horse. There he compared his own hondo with the broken piece, grunted, and put the broken hondo inside his shirt. Leaving the corral, he worked around it, gradually widening his circle. He found where a horse had recently been ridden close to the pen, but that was all. Pinky, probably, Jiggs thought, looking things over.

The Piñon Hills had nothing more to offer, and so Jiggs headed home, riding back past Sandoval's. Narciso looked at him still blank-eyed. There was nothing for Jiggs, the native said.

When he reached the Junction, Jiggs unsaddled and turned his horse out. Walking to the house, he passed the shed and paused there briefly. Carl Siskin's saddle was in the shed and Jiggs took a good long look at it and grunted. He had the beginnings of an idea. Before he reached the camp cabin another idea struck him. He went into the house and, after a word with Dutch, dug out his soiled clothes. Pawing through them, he found a shirt and from its pocket produced a little roll of horsehair. The mystified Dutch looked on while Jiggs unrolled the hair and put it on the table.

"Where'd you get that?" demanded Dutch. "Off yore girl?"

"No," Jiggs answered.

"It's sure curly," Dutch observed. "Looks like she'd spent a long time with a curlin' iron, puttin' that wave in it. Red-headed, too."

Jiggs rerolled the hair and put it in his pocket.

"There was some friends of yores past here this afternoon," Dutch commented, making conversation and emphasizing the word "friends." "Frenchy Nolen an' Nick Rice. They stopped in. Frenchy is still cussin' you for bustin' him one, an' Nick ain't forgot you treein' him an' Ward an' all Pinos Altos with that steer. Say, did old Frank really put you to huntin' Pinky? Nick said that

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Frank popped off at that meetin' the cowmen had. Said that Frank swore he was goin' to put you to huntin' Pinky, an' that you'd find him. Is that right?"

"That's about right," Jiggs agreed. "Frenchy is still sore, is he?"

"I'll tell a man he's sore. An' if you ask me, Nick don't love you neither."

"Mebbe not," Jiggs said absently. "Are you goin' to run in the horses or am I, or ain't we goin' to keep a horse up tonight?"

"You do it," Dutch answered. "I'm cookin' beans."

NARCISO SANDOVAL came down to the Junction camp the next morning. Dutch was already out on his ride when Narciso came in, and Jiggs walked out to meet the native. Narciso first cautiously investigated the cabin and corrals and shed, and then gave Jiggs the message that he carried.

"El Señor Larrabee, hees esay to meet heem at my *casa* theese day. Hees esay come *a las doce*."

A las doce. Twelve o'clock, noon. "*Gracias*, Narciso," Jiggs answered. "*Yo vendré*." Having given that assurance, Jiggs said no more. He gave Narciso the makings and talked about goats and not about Pinky Larrabee. If he talked about Pinky, Narciso would become suspicious, but to talk about goats pleased el Señor Sandoval. After a while Narciso left. Jiggs loafed around the cabin. In his preoccupation he did not see the two men who came to the top of the rise west of the cabin and stared down at it.

The visitors were Frenchy Nolen and Nick Rice. When they reached the ridge top they paused. "Want to go down an' visit, Frenchy?" Nick inquired.

Frenchy's answer was a curse.

"Mebbe there's nobody there." Nick grinned.

"There's somebody there, all right," Frenchy answered. "That blasted Maunday. That's his grulla in the corral."

At that moment Jiggs came out of the house and walked to the corral. Instinctively Rice reined his horse back until a clump of brush interposed between him and the camp. Frenchy was already screened by the brush and did not move.

"Goin' out," Frenchy commented as Jiggs led Quien Sabe through the gate.

"Kind of a late start for a ride," Rice commented. "Now I wonder just—"

Jiggs had mounted the grulla and started north. For an instant Rice checked his speech. Then: "He acts like he was goin' some place and knew where it was," the Buckle foreman drawled. "Let's go along after him a ways. What say, Frenchy?"

"We might just as well," the other man agreed. "Maybe he's goin' up to that old corral again."

"He won't find nothin' there," Rice said confidently. "Let's give him a little more start an' then take after him."

Jiggs, all unaware of the conversation that was taking place on the ridge top, not even suspecting that he was being followed, kept right on toward Sandoval's. He was going to meet Pinky Larrabee and so preoccupied was he with the fact and with the questions that he intended to ask Pinky, that he failed in his usual caution. Half a mile behind him, keeping well out of sight, Nick Rice and Frenchy Nolen rode along.

Pinky was not at the Sandoval house but in the piñons. Jiggs, with directions given him by Narciso, found the red-headed man waiting

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for him among the trees. He rode up while Pinky watched him alertly, and then as Jiggs stopped and thrust out his hand, Pinky's face broke into a grin.

There were signs of wear and tear on Pinky Larrabee. His clothing was dirty and his face showed something of the strain he was undergoing.

"You look like the tail end of a hard winter," commented Jiggs. "Bess told me you were here."

"I got that note she wrote," Pinky told him. "Bess says she told you about us meetin'. What's on your mind, Jiggs?"

"Plenty." Jiggs settled comfortably into his saddle. "In the first place, I want to find out what you know. Bess said that you an' Carl had been watchin' that corral. How come you weren't with Carl, Pinky?"

DARK anger came over Pinky Larrabee's face. "Bess wanted to see me," he answered. "Carl brought the word an' said that he was goin' to take another look at the corral. He seemed to think that Carmody or Rice was goin' to be there. They had some calves penned an' was weanin' 'em in the pen. They hadn't branded the calves an' we'd been watchin' the place so we could be on hand when they tried to move 'em. If I'd been with Carl—" He stopped. If Pinky Larrabee had been with Carl, then Siskin would still be alive. Both men thought of that.

"It's yore idea that Bess keep still about meetin' you," Jiggs drawled. "She told me that you wanted her to keep still."

"I do. I'm in the clear, but if the Buckle bunch think that everybody's after me, they'll get careless. We'll catch 'em."

"Folks ain't goin' to believe Bess when she says that she was with you," Jiggs warned. "They're goin' to think she's lyin' to save yore hide. Frank Toombs has put me on the job, Pinky. I'm to get the man that killed Carl Siskin."

Larrabee nodded thoughtfully.

"An' the cowmen have formed an Anticowthief Association," Jiggs continued. "Nick Rice is ridin' for 'em."

"Nick Rice!" Pinky exploded. "He's one of the prime movers. Nick Rice is one of them that's stealin' calves."

"You can't just go around sayin' that. Folks won't believe you. Rice has got to be caught with the goods."

"I know it. How are we goin' to do that, Jiggs?"

Jiggs scowled. "I've got some ideas," he said. "I've found some things that'll maybe help. For a long time I really thought that it was you an' Carl, Pinky. From what I'd seen an' knew, it looked bad. I expect I'd still think so if it wasn't for what Bess said."

Neither man spoke for fully a minute. "Maybe," Jiggs said tentatively, "it would be a good idea for you to give yourself up. Maybe—"

"I won't do that!" Pinky's voice was curt. "I wouldn't last long enough to get to town. They killed Carl an' they'd kill me. Carl caught 'em dead to rights an' they downed him. Get another idea, Jiggs."

Quien Sabe had moved around until he faced the east. Pinky was looking at Jiggs, but Jiggs could see the piñons that screened the little clearing wherein they talked. Beyond the nearest piñon he caught a glimpse of movement. Dropping his hand to the butt of the Winchester, he pulled it out swiftly and with the gun's hammer cocked,

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shoved the barrel of the gun at Pinky.

"Get yore hands up!" he commanded brusquely.

"What—"

"Damn you! I've got you!" Jiggs' voice was raised. "Get yore hands up!"

Nick Rice and Frenchy Nolen came riding into the clearing.

"You damned traitor!" Pinky gasped. "You—"

"Shut up an' lift yore hands!"

Slowly Pinky's hands come up, shoulder-high. He glanced at Rice and Nolen and then back to Jiggs.

"An' I thought you was on the level," Pinky said slowly. "Go on an' shoot, Maunday. Earn yore blood money."

Jiggs, face stony, thrust the Winchester a little farther forward. "I got you," he said triumphantly. "You murderer!"

THE Buckle foreman and Frenchy stopped their horses. They were not ten feet away when they halted, and both wore satisfied grins.

"So you got him," Rice rasped. "All right, Maunday. You can turn the murderin' devil over to me. I'm ridin' for the Association. I'll take him in."

"Not much!" Jiggs shook his head. "There's five hundred dollars on him. I'm goin' to collect it." He moved Quien Sabe as he spoke, backing the horse a trifle, putting Pinky ahead of him but staying between Larrabee and the two newcomers. "Ease down yore left hand, Pinky, an' unbuckle yore gun belt," he ordered. "Take it gentle."

"I'll cover him!" Rice's gun, already drawn, lifted. "You get the belt, Maunday. You needn't worry about the reward. I'll see that you get it. I'm goin' to take him to town."

"I'll go right along with you," Jiggs stated. "I ain't goin' to miss out on the five hundred."

"I'll never get to town," Pinky rasped, gun belt swinging free in his hand. "You don't mean to take me there, Rice."

Jiggs, reaching out for the swinging belt, Winchester still cocked and ready, thought that he had never seen such an expression on a man's face as he saw on Rice's. Cupidity, triumph and hate blended.

Nolen, his gun also out and covering Pinky, snarled: "We ought to kill you right now, you murderin' skunk. Downin' yore pardner!"

"You'll get to town," Jiggs told Pinky. "Rice, you an' Nolen head out. I'll bring Larrabee along behind you." He hated this, all of it. He hated the things that Pinky must be thinking, he hated the danger to which, all unknowingly, he had exposed the red-headed man. But he knew that he could not turn Pinky loose. He could not be stamped as Pinky's friend and accomplice. And more, there was a plan in Jiggs' mind, a scheme that, hanging by a slender, tenuous thread, might work. Pinky, given any chance at all, could be cleared. Bess Toombs' alibi would stand up in a court and free Pinky Larrabee. That was some assurance and eased Jiggs' mind somewhat. But to get Pinky to a place where the alibi would carry weight was the problem. Jiggs wanted Nick Rice and Frenchy Nolen ahead of him where he could watch them.

"Lead out," Jiggs ordered again. "Nobody is goin' to get that reward but me."

For an instant he thought that it would not work. Then Rice glanced at Frenchy Nolen and nodded. Frenchy, scowling, slowly holstered his gun.

"All right, Maunday," Rice said

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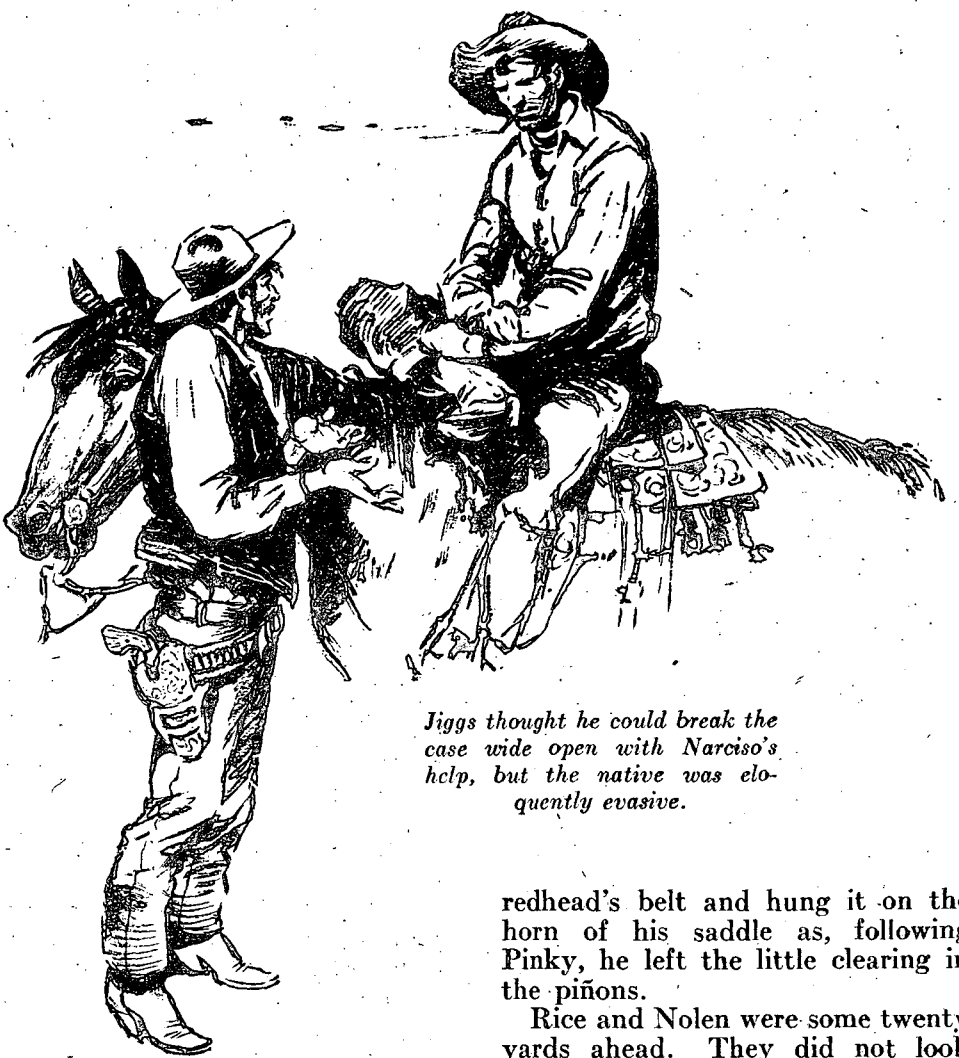

Jiggs thought he could break the case wide open with Narciso's help, but the native was eloquently evasive.

easily. "We'll show you the way to town. We ain't goin' to try to beat you out of the reward money."

He slid his gun into its holster, grinned maliciously at Pinky and Jiggs, and turned his horse. Nolen fell into place beside him and they started through the piñons. With a sigh of relief Jiggs turned to Pinky.

"Head after 'em," he commanded.

Reluctantly, Pinky turned his horse and started ahead. With swift, deft hands Jiggs buckled the redhead's belt and hung it on the horn of his saddle as, following Pinky, he left the little clearing in the piñons.

Rice and Nolen were some twenty yards ahead. They did not look back nor did they ride particularly close to each other, but Jiggs was certain that they were talking. Pinky knew that, too. His voice, coming over his shoulder to Jiggs, was bitter.

"You bit off a big chunk, Maunday, when you said you'd get me to town. We won't get there. They don't aim for me to get there. I know too much. Frenchy's in with the Buckle."

Jiggs made no answer. Pinky was right, he thought, as far as he went.

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Nolen and Rice did not intend Pinky Larrabee to reach Pinos Altos alive, but that was only part of it. They did not intend that Jiggs Maunday should reach town either. Jiggs dropped back so that a full fifteen feet separated him from his captive. The Winchester grip was in his right hand and his left hand held the reins and the gun's short forearm. Riding so, Jiggs was not masked by Pinky and could watch both of the men ahead. And he did watch them. Nick Rice and Frenchy Nolen took all his attention and Pinky Larrabee was only secondary.

The two men up ahead seemingly were content to ride along and lead the way. They glanced back now and then, but aside from that they acted easy, just as they should have acted. On Jiggs the strain grew. He had fifteen miles or more to town and at any time in that fifteen miles trouble could break. Pinky might, foolishly, make a run for it, and if the redhead jumped the gun, those two up ahead would unlimber their artillery. Pinky would be killed or hurt and Jiggs would get hurt, too. And even if Pinky went along peacefully there was still trouble pending. Nick Rice and Frenchy Nolen were not the kind to let a chance like this slip. The only question was: When would they make their play? Jiggs did not know. The initiative was out of his hands, and all he could do was watch.

THEY had gone a full six miles from the place of capture before the break came. Rice and Nolen must have decided on the spot and arranged their play. The little procession had reached the wagon road from the Junction into town and were following it. The road bent sharply around a mesquite growth and, for an instant, the two advance riders were out of sight. But Jiggs, not lulled or eased by the seeming acquiescence of his companions, saw Nolen's hat above the mesquite as the swarthy man moved quickly to the left, and so was not caught flat-footed. He spurred Quien Sabe, picking the horse up out of his lethargy, and swung out to the right. At the same time he rasped a hoarse command: "Stop, Larrabee!"

Startled, Pinky reined in, and Jiggs, clearing the mesquite, saw Rice and Nolen, both facing him, separated by some ten yards and both with drawn guns.

Rice swung his Colt up to cover Jiggs, surprised by Jiggs' sudden shift in position. Nolen was leveling off at Pinky. In that brief instant Jiggs had a choice and took it. He snapped a shot at Frenchy Nolen, aiming to kill. Nolen's horse, moving, spoiled Jiggs' good intentions. The one-hundred-and-seventy-grain soft-point from the Winchester caught the swarthy man's side, just under his lifted arm, and tearing through the big muscle there, smashed Nolen half around and back against the cantle of his saddle. Nolen's horse, alarmed by the shot, jumped to the left, and Nolen, unseated, and heavily shocked by the smash of the shot, went down.

Jiggs saw none of this, for he had swung the Winchester on Rice. His right hand raced with the lever and the gun was ready. But Jiggs did not shoot. Rice, caught flat-footed and surprised, had his gun up, but as the Winchester came in line he opened his hand. The Colt dropped and Rice jerked up on the reins, holding his frightened horse.

"Hold it, Pinky!" Jiggs yelled. "Hold it right there!"

Pinky might have intended to break for freedom but that harsh

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command froze him. He, like Rice, held his horse. Frenchy Nolen was trying to sit up, bleeding from his wounded side, face white with pain and fear. His horse had run a short distance and stopped. Jiggs Maunday commanded the situation.

"Get Nolen's horse," he commanded Rice. "Then look after yore pardner. I told you I'd take Larrabee to town, an' I meant it. An' don't get any ideas, Rice. Just leave that gun where you dropped it."

Carefully, watching Jiggs as he moved, Nick Rice dismounted.

JIGGS made Pinky dismount while Rice, with strips torn from Nolen's shirt, bandaged the man's wound. Jiggs, too, got down and picked up Rice's six-shooter and Nolen's gun, tying them to his saddle. Pinky carried a canteen and Nolen was given a drink of water. It was plain that he could not move for some time, perhaps could not ride at all. Jiggs saw that and reached a decision.

"I'm goin' to take Larrabee in," he stated, looking at Rice and Nolen. "You can come along if you're able. Anyhow when I get to town I'll send a wagon out to haul Nolen. I'll take yore guns so there won't be no more accidents."

Without a word, Rice scowled at him. Rice could cheerfully have cut Jiggs' throat right there. Somehow that thought cheered Jiggs Maunday.

"You'll have time to cook up a yarn before you get to town," Jiggs informed the scowling man. "Better make it a good one because I know what happened. You wait till I'm mounted, Pinky, before you get up. Just be easy now."

With that admonition Jiggs straddled Quien Sabe. "All right," he said, when he was in the saddle. "Now, Pinky."

Pinky mounted his horse and, without command, started along the road. Jiggs followed, glancing back after he had passed, to where Nick Rice stood beside Nolen. "I'll send the wagon right out," he called cheerfully. "It won't be long."

When they were out of earshot of Rice, Jiggs made overtures to Pinky. "I had to throw down on you, Pinky," he said regretfully. "They come along an'—"

"You're a damned traitor, Maunday," Pinky interrupted. "You used Bess to catch me, that's what you done. You had Rice an' Nolen planted."

"So they could try to kill you an' me both," Jiggs said with sarcasm, "an' so I could shoot 'em."

"You didn't count on that. You thought they'd help you take me in."

"All right." Jiggs saw that there was no use arguing. "Have it yore way. But push along to town. I want to send that wagon out, an' I want to do it before dark."

It was five o'clock before Jiggs Maunday and his captive reached Pinos Altos and stopped at the courthouse. A man coming down the steps of the building saw the two ride up and stood, staring unbelievingly, as Pinky dismounted, followed by Jiggs and the Winchester. Then, with a sudden realization of what he saw, the man on the steps yelped shrilly and ran down across the courthouse yard to spread the news.

Stiffly, Pinky ahead, Jiggs in the rear, the two entered the courthouse and traversed the corridor to the sheriff's office. Turner Bright jumped up from the sheriff's desk. The jailer's chair went over with a

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crash, and the checkers from the game they had been playing, scattered and rolled across the floor.

"What—" Bright began.

"Never mind what!" Jiggs ordered harshly. "Here's Pinky Larrabee an' you can put him in a cell. I'll stick with him. He's worth five hundred bucks to me. I want to send word out to old Frank Toombs that I got him an' you'd better send a wagon out along the road to Narciso Sandoval's place. There's a man hurt out there."

CHAPTER VIII

A KNOT FOR A MURDERER'S NECK

IN Pinos Altos, when district court was not in session, the justice of the peace held hearings in the big room of the courthouse. On the day following Pinky Larrabee's capture, the courtroom began to fill up early. The news of the capture had spread around the town and out into Pinos County. Many of the curious had come to the courthouse the night before, but most of them had been turned away. The favored few who were allowed admission had seen Jiggs Maunday, sitting in the corridor of the jail, his rifle across his knees. That was as far as anyone got. Even Henry Ward, the sheriff, despite his blustering, had been turned back by Jiggs.

It was not until Frank Toombs and his granddaughter arrived, around midnight, that Pinky had any visitors. Jiggs let Bess go down the corridor to Pinky's cell, but he detained Frank Toombs. It seemed to Jiggs, talking to Toombs, that the wind had gone out of the old man. Toombs should have been pleased and elated at Pinky's capture, but he wasn't. His voice was heavy and weary, and the force was gone from it when he told Jiggs that he would write him a five-hundred-dollar check.

"You better wait till after the hearin'," Jiggs drawled. "Mebbe I've got the wrong man."

"By Tophet, I hope you have!" Toombs blurted. "Bess says—"

He stopped and didn't tell Jiggs what his granddaughter had said, but Jiggs could guess. It must have been a bad ride to town for old Frank Toombs, with Bess telling him that she loved Pinky Larrabee and crying and accusing Jiggs of treachery. Jiggs could figure that out easy. Bess, when she left Pinky, walked past Jiggs, her head high, not looking at him, and shortly after she departed, a young lawyer, sleepy-eyed and his nightshirt tucked into the top of his pants, appeared and said that he had been employed to represent Mr. Larrabee. Jiggs let the lawyer go down the corridor. He was talking to Dutch when the lawyer came.

Dutch nodded as Jiggs concluded his speech and, going to the sheriff's office, borrowed a shotgun and some buckshot shells from Turner Bright. Then Dutch camped in the chair in the corridor and Jiggs went on out. Jiggs had something else to do besides watch Pinky Larrabee.

There was another center of attraction in Pinos Altos that night. About ten o'clock a wagon, dispatched by Turner Bright from the livery barn, came rolling back into town and stopped at Doc Ausherman's little hospital. Frenchy Nolen was unloaded and carried inside and the curious hung around the hospital to see Nick Rice come out and ride away toward the Buckle. Some three hours after Rice departed he came into Pinos Altos again, Jess Carmody and three hard-faced Buckle hands accompanying him.

The riders stopped in town, but

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Rice and Carmody went on to Ausherman's. Most of Pinos Altos had gone to bed by that time and there was no one to see Rice and Carmody go into the hospital except Jiggs Maunday. Jiggs came up out of the dark after Carmody and Rice left their horses and, taking a chance, lighted a match. It was a gamble, but he hoped that he would win it. The match went out and Jiggs moved away, well satisfied. Carmody had ridden his best horse into town, just as Jiggs had hoped, and now there were two strings to the bow that Jiggs planned to use.

What Carmody and Rice and Nolen talked about in the hospital was not reported, but in the morning Doc Ausherman told his wife about the visitors. Doc had been excluded from the room while the men talked and he didn't like that. Mrs. Ausherman told the neighbors about the visit, and there was plenty of gossip. From Mrs. Ausherman's report, Carmody and Rice had been angry when they left Nolen. No one spoke of the other visit the two made. Mrs. Ward, the sheriff's wife, knew of it, but she kept still. Her husband had commanded her not to speak of how Rice and Carmody had come to his house in the early morning hours and got him out of bed.

PINKY LARRABEE'S hearing was set for ten o'clock. By nine o'clock all the seats in the courtroom were taken and there were plenty of cowmen and cowpunchers that could not find places. The Buckle crew, with Jess Carmody and Nick Rice leading the procession, came in about nine thirty and made a little group against the wall close by a front window. Immediately after the Buckle arrived, Frank Toombs and Bess entered. Sandy Erickson got up and gave Bess his seat, right down in front against the railing that divided the room.

A few minutes later the district attorney entered and walked briskly to the dais upon which the justice of the peace sat importantly. Judge and attorney entered into a conversation and while they talked, Jiggs Maunday strolled up the center aisle, carrying his short-barreled Winchester in his right hand and a collection of short pieces of rope in his left. He appeared thoroughly at ease as he passed through the railing gate and sat down at the counsel table. The scene was set and now came the principal actors.

Henry Ward, sheriff of Pinos County, was first of these. He came in and joined the justice of the peace and the district attorney. Then Pinky Larrabee, preceded by his young lawyer and flanked by Turner Bright and Dutch, who still carried the sawed-off shotgun, emerged from the jail entrance. Pinky halted when he reached the counsel table and there was a brief and low-voiced altercation. Those who were closest heard Pinky say: "I won't sit down with him. Not with that skunk!"

The lawyer spoke quietly for a moment and finally Pinky, scowling, sat down. The justice of the peace cleared his throat importantly.

"This justice court is open," he announced. "Stand up, Larrabee."

Pinky stood up.

"Yo're accused of killin' Carl Siskin," the justice announced. "This is a preliminary hearin'. How do you plead?"

The young lawyer, standing beside Pinky, gave the answer: "We plead not guilty."

"Set down. Mr. District Attorney, you call yore witnesses."

"Wait a minute, judge." The slow

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drawl came from the counsel table. In the courtroom men and women shifted and stretched their necks to watch Jiggs Maunday come slowly to his feet. The justice of the peace scowled.

"You're out of order," he snapped. "Set down."

"Not till I'm done." The Winchester resting on the table top was under Jiggs' hand. "I'm representin' Pinky Larrabee an' he's accused of murder. I got somethin' to say."

Excited talk rippled across the courtroom. The justice of the peace pounded with his fist on his desk top. He was an old cowman, the stamp plain upon him. Failing to bring order with voice and pounding fist, he produced a Colt from his baggy trousers and slapped the desk top with the gun. That brought quiet.

"You're still out of order," he announced.

"This is a justice court," Jiggs drawled. "Do you want to get this thing straight or don't you? I'm the man that caught Larrabee. What's the matter with lettin' me talk? The district attorney would have to call me anyhow. I found Carl's body, too."

Back in the room an excited cowhand yelled: "Let him talk!" The yell was taken up. Again the judge slapped the desk top with his Colt.

"Go on an' talk then," he commanded. "But I *still* say yo're out of order."

JIGGS, having carried his point, grinned tightly. He reached into his shirt and brought out a short piece of weathered, dirty rope and put it on the table top. Then, lifting the short pieces of new rope in his left hand, he faced the courtroom. He was not trying a case before the justice of the peace; he was trying it before all of Pinos Altos, all Pinos County.

"The TU has been losin' calves," he drawled. "Mr. Toombs will tell you so if you don't all know it. He's had calves stole. I expect that that's where all this starts. With them calves."

"Your honor!" The district attorney was on his feet, one hand lifted.

"Let him talk!" The judge waved his Colt and the district attorney sat down. He could see from the faces of the crowd that they wanted Jiggs to continue and, being a politician first and a lawyer second, he was wise enough to keep his silence.

"With the calves," Jiggs repeated, as quiet was restored. "Now there's plenty of cowmen here. I want to try somethin'. I got some rope an' I want some of you boys that know how, to tie some hondos. Will you do that? It's got a bearin' on the case." Without waiting for any answer, Jiggs advanced to the railing. Rapidly he handed out pieces of rope to four puzzled, tan-faced men.

"Go ahead an' tie 'em," Jiggs directed. "Just like you always do."

Henry Ward was at the end of the

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rail, close to the Buckle men, and Jess Carmody was bent toward the sheriff, earnestly engaged in conversation. Jiggs saw them out of the corner of his eye. He retreated a step and stooped to whisper to Dutch. Dutch nodded stolidly and faced toward Ward and Carmody, the shotgun across his knees. Jiggs, a small grin on his face, came to the rail again and held out his hand. A cowman placed a finished hondo knot in his fingers. Jiggs stood there, dangling the rope.

"Everybody ties a hondo a little different," he drawled conversationally. "If you'll look, you'll see it."

The men with the ropes looked at each other and then down to the knots they had tied. Heads came together as they compared knots. A grizzled oldster in the front row said: "By gosh, that's right. Mine's different from yores, George."

"They're all different," Jiggs assured him. "Not much, but some. Some of you will tie a Turk's head an' some won't. Some'll fray out a rope an' some'll just let it go. Some'll tie yore overhand knot left-handed an' some'll lay it to the right. Now here's a hondo knot I found." He took a step back and picked up the worn piece of rope. "Look at it."

The rope passed from hand to hand. "I found that rope," Jiggs said casually, "in a little brush corral right by where Carl Siskin was killed. Somebody'd broke the hondo, ropin' calves, an' cut that off so he could tie a new knot. Would you fellows say that the man that done that was a rustler?"

A murmur of assent went up. The old man who had appealed to George announced: "That's right, Maunday."

"Good enough," drawled Jiggs. "Now, Pinky. You tie a hondo knot."

For just an instant Pinky Larrabee hesitated. Then, picking up a piece of new rope, he tied a knot. Jiggs, back at the table again, did not look at Pinky but watched Carmody and Rice and the Buckle crew. They were spread out along the wall now, all looking at him. Carmody's face, the sprouting beard dark upon it, was pale and impassive. Nick Rice was nervous. His eyes flashed to right and left, and then back to Jiggs.

"Here, Jiggs," Pinky said.

Jiggs took the rope and tossed it to the cowmen at the rail. "Does it match that broken hondo?" he asked quietly.

THERE was silence in the courtroom. This appealed to the men of Pinos Altos. Here was a man, using the lore of their own calling, as evidence in the case.

"By thunder, it don't!" the old cowman exploded. "This here's got a Turk's head in it. The other one ain't."

Jiggs nodded his satisfaction. "I meant to bring in Siskin's rope, but I was crowded for time," he drawled. "You'll have to take my word for it that Carl didn't tie a Turk's head neither when he made a hondo. He just frayed out the end. An' that broke rope's a maguey an' not Manila. It's a different kind of rope."

He paused and looked at Carmody once more. "Let's get away from ropes for a minute," he continued. "I come up here from Mexico. Down in Mexico they got a lot of horses, some of 'em freaks. I found some horsehair in that corral. Here it is." He handed the little curl of sorrel hair to Dutch who looked at it, wide-eyed, and was

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about to return it when the justice of the peace intervened.

"Give me that," the judge ordered. "I know as much about a horse as George Bibbs or Darby Patterson."

"Give it to him," Jiggs directed. "That horsehair is curled. It's been out in the weather, but the curl's still in it. It come from just one kind of horse: a chino. They're kind of common down in Mexico. Curly all over an' with a mane an' tail that look like they been worked on with a curlin' iron. There's a sorrel chino horse tied to the hitch rail out in front right now. Mebbe you know who owns him."

Jiggs had to talk fast now, had to go on with it. His voice lost its easy drawl. "The TU can be run into a Rockin' Cross easy enough," he said. "Everybody knows that. But it can be run into somethin' else, too. That's yore chino horse out in front, Carmody. Now, you an' Nick Rice tie hondo knots an' let us look at 'em."

Just for an instant silence held after Jiggs made that demand. In that silence the thoughts in the courtroom could almost be heard. A sorrel chino horse, a maguey rope, and both common in Mexico. Jess Carmody had moved up from Mexico and so had Nick Rice. The TU brand could be turned into a Rocking Cross but, almost as easily, it could be burned into a Buckle.

"Tie 'em!" Jiggs tossed the remainder of his short lengths of rope toward the Buckle men who stood along the wall.

That movement broke the silence and the stillness. A hard-faced Buckle rider, close beside a window, threw a leg across the sill and followed it, dropping out of sight. Jess Carmody, caught, went for the gun under his coat, and Nick Rice, breaking, but like a weasel fighting in a trap, dragged his weapon from its holster.

Every man in the room, save one, was caught unprepared. Women screamed and men dropped to the floor, seeking safety. But Jiggs Maunday, sweeping up the Winchester from the table top, handling the carbine as though it were a Colt, threw a slug toward the wall, a one-hundred-and-seventy-grain, soft-pointed piece of lead that smashed into Jess Carmody and threw him back. Jiggs' hand snapped the lever of the Winchester down and up as Nick Rice's first shot gouged splinters from the oak top of the table.

Behind Jiggs, the justice of the peace brought up his Colt and leveled down, and his harsh voice shouted an order:

"Don't you, Ward! I've got the drop."

Henry Ward, seeing the leveled Colt, slowly lowered the gun that he had aimed at Jiggs Maunday, and the carbine in Jiggs' hands rapped out again and then again. Rice, hit twice, slid down the wall beside his boss, still trying to get his Colt up and going, still fighting. The effort was too great and the gun thumped to the floor. Dutch, finally aroused, had the remaining Buckle men covered with the shotgun.

BESS TOOMBS had come through the railing gate and, her arms around Pinky Larrabee's neck, held him as he tried to get out of his chair. The district attorney was on his feet and Pinky's young lawyer, white-faced with fright, was still sitting at the table, motionless as a wooden statue. Above the clamor in the courtroom sounded the judge's

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harsh voice and the heavy thudding of his gun as he beat it on the table top.

"Order in the court!" he thundered. "I'm goin' to have order or somebody'll git hurt. Turner, grab the sheriff. He's tryin' to git away!"

Cowmen, from the nature of their calling, are quick and never long in taking action. The Buckle men, those that were still present and on their feet, were surrounded, disarmed, and pushed back against the wall. The judge, giving up his effort to restore order, came pushing down from the dais, through the gate and into the crowd around the Buckle riders. His voice, shouting, now did the thing he wanted and restored quiet to the room.

"Shut up! Rice ain't dead! He's tryin' to talk!"

Nick Rice was not dead. Lying on the floor, looking up at the faces that bent above him, Rice's eyes singled out Jiggs Maunday.

"It was Jess," Rice said weakly, and paused while the bloody froth was wiped from his lips. "He got greedy. Wasn't satisfied—"

"Was it you or Carmody," Jiggs demanded as Rice gasped and the ready cloth wiped his lips again. "Which of you killed Siskin?"

"Carmody. Siskin . . . had a calf caught. We rode up. . . . Ah! Damn you, Maunday! I should have—"

No one learned what Nick Rice should have done. For an instant more he lay gasping and then the heaving chest collapsed in one last breath.

"The end of it!" Jiggs said bleakly. "That's the finish."

Of course, Jiggs was wrong. It was not quite the finish. There was still Henry Ward to question, to drive at with hard words and harsher looks and threaten until he confessed his part in the affair. Ward knew that Carmody and Rice were stealing calves from the TU. All the Buckle crew knew it, but neither Ward nor the remaining Buckle riders had actually taken part in the rustling. At least, so they said, and no one could prove differently. But Ward had been paid off. He had taken money from Carmody and had been Carmody's man. That much the sheriff confessed. The district attorney and the justice of the peace questioned Ward and the Buckle hands. Jiggs had no part in it.

Jiggs, too, was pommeled with questions. Asked how he had done this and why he had done that. The district attorney, disgruntled about the whole affair, demanded the reason for Jiggs' not having come to him with his information, and was not satisfied with Jiggs' answer that there hadn't been time.

"You wouldn't have believed me," Jiggs said finally, when the lawyer became too insistent. "Nobody would believe me. You were all like Frank Toombs. You had yore heads set that it was Pinky Larrabee and you wouldn't have believed it if I'd told you Carmody was the man. I just had to show you." That settled the lawyer, and the justice of the peace was satisfied, too.

Men came to Jiggs and shook hands with him. He was the center of attraction. A shamefaced Pinky Larrabee, accompanied by Bess Toombs, arrived in front of Jiggs and stammered his apologies.

"I might've knowed it," Pinky declared. "I might've knowed that you were a square shooter. But it looked like— Well, you know—"

"It's all right, Pinky," Jiggs interrupted. "I don't blame you. It sure looked like I'd double-crossed

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you, but that was the only way I could see to play it." He shook hands with Pinky and grinned at Bess.

GRADUALLY things cleared up in the Pinos Altos courthouse. Someone thought of Frenchy Nolen in the hospital, and a deputation left to question him. It was plain that Frenchy, when he worked for the TU, had been taking his pay from Carmody. Riding line as he had, Frenchy was in an ideal position to let Carmody and Rice take calves across. Carl Siskin had been blamed for that misdeed, but Carl, of course, was innocent. Frank Toombs came to shake hands with Jiggs and talk and praise him, and go away again. Then the bodies were taken from the courtroom and, for an instant, Jiggs was alone.

Quien Sabe was at the hitch rail outside, waiting, and Jiggs, watching the curious crane their necks for a last look at Carmody and Rice, thought about the grulla horse. He could slip out now unnoticed, and straddle Quien Sabe and get away. He could ride out of Pinos Altos and out of the country, just as he had ridden out of Mexico. Faces came up in his mind to torment him: the dark face of Tomaso Real, other faces that belonged below the border. Dead men's faces. He could see Jess Carmody, his lips snarling, his eyes suddenly filled with agony and shock and then growing blank. He could see Nick Rice's eyes, searching his own, and almost hear Rice's voice as he gasped: "Ah! Damn you, Maunday! I should have—"

But a man couldn't ride away from faces. No matter where the country or who were the people in it, there was always recollection. Quien Sabe could just stay at the hitch rail and wait. A man had to stop some place and for Jiggs Maunday it might just as well be here.

The justice of the peace, coming up briskly, stopped beside Jiggs. Over across the room, within the railed inclosure, Frank Toombs, beard bristling, was laying down the law to Bess and Pinky. The redhead, his arm around Bess, was grinning. Evidently whatever Toombs was saying wasn't so very bad.

"Maunday—" the justice of the peace began.

Jiggs interrupted his honor's words. "You marry people, don't you?" he drawled.

"Why . . . yes." The J. P. was puzzled. "I marry 'em. I want to know—"

"An' get paid for it?" Jiggs' drawl again cut into the justice's speech.

"Of course I get paid. Say, listen. I want to know—"

Jiggs looked at Pinky and Bess and Frank Toombs. He put his hand on the arm of the justice and half turned the man.

"You'd better protect yore interests then," Jiggs advised mildly. "There's goin' to be a weddin' around here, an' if you don't get yore licks in first, some preacher's goin' to beat yore time."

Leaving the startled man, Jiggs walked on across the room to Toombs and Pinky and Bess. He wasn't worried about the justice of the peace. The judge could stall around all he wanted to, but Jiggs was not going to be left out. There was a job at a wedding that Jiggs Maunday could fill to perfection, and he intended to get it: the job of being best man.

THE END

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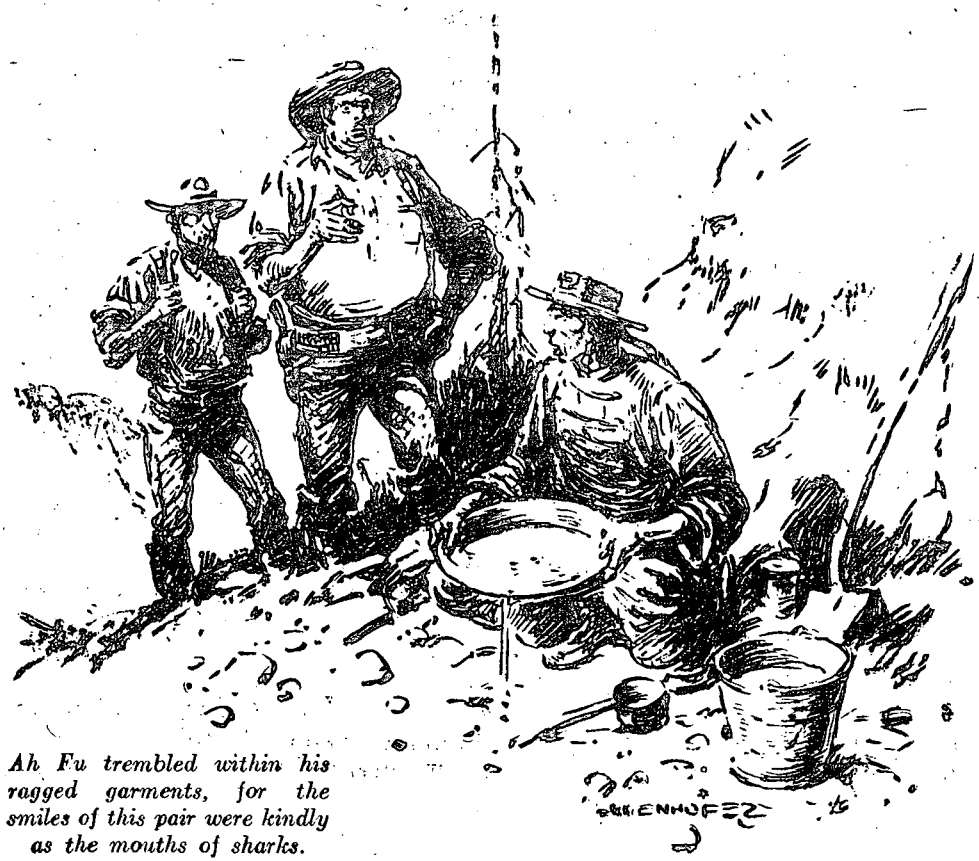
GUNS ON GRAVEYARD HILL

by Mojave Lloyd

Ah Fu partly straightened his crooked old spine and stood with his gold pan in one hand and a rusty tomato can in the other. He squinted down at the few grains of gold in the bottom of the can, shook his head sadly, then turned with a startled expression toward where the dry rattle of gravel signaled approaching boots.

Behind the peaks of the distant Coast Range, far away across the hazy Sacramento Valley, the sun was setting in a wild red glare. At the foot of the low hill, where Ah Fu was standing, a hydraulic giant was working, slicing into rock and gravel like a razor would slice a turnip. Against the glare of the sunset, the five-inch stream of water the giant was throwing looked like a curved shiny fish bone Ah Fu had played with in the long ago on the banks of the Yangtze Kiang.

The wizened old Chinaman sighed deeply. If he only had a giant



Ah Fu trembled within his ragged garments, for the smiles of this pair were kindly as the mouths of sharks.

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like that! Instead of a few grains of gold laboriously panned and put in a rusty tomato can, in no time at all this little hill he owned would be sent flying into a flume. He would then be rich —plenty rich to take the remains of his three beloved countrymen back to holy China for proper burial, an expense that should have been borne by the evil Enos Pratt.

The rattle of footsteps was growing louder. Suddenly two men scrambled up the slope of Graveyard Hill and stopped in front of Ah Fu.

The one who spoke was a paunchy man of medium height with eyes that looked like the halves of a hard-boiled egg. He batted dust from his broadcloth trousers with an expensive Stetson and swished sweat from his forehead with a fat forefinger. The smile he laid on Ah Fu was as kindly as the mouth of a shark. The Chinaman's frail body trembled within his ragged garments.

"I got good news for you, Ah Fu," the paunchy man chuckled. "Sure as I own the Bedrock bank and a gold mine, I got good news for you." He pointed down the hill. "See where my giant's cutting?"

Ah Fu's faded eyes looked down toward the foot of the hill. He removed his flat-black straw hat and bobbed his head till tight spirals formed along his braided queue.

"Devil engine," he said. His thin voice squeaked like a worn-out wheelbarrow. "Cut like hell." He smiled his wan smile.

"That's just it," Enos Pratt said. "I've cut myself clean out of gravel. I'm right up to your line there at the base of the hill. Now I'm going to blast your Graveyard Hill into my flume. And listen!"

The owner of most of the town of Bedrock and the pay dirt surrounding it smiled still more broadly, making the pupils of his eyes look like two narrow strips of yellow sticking plaster.

"I'm going to give you ten percent of the gold your hill's got in it," he said generously. "Ain't that something?"

The twisting of the black-ribbon bow on the end of Ah Fu's long queue could have been caused by the cold chills running up and down his bent old spine. It took him a minute or so to unlimber his tongue.

"No can do," he squeaked, and shook his head disconsolately. With a gnarled hand he pointed up toward the top of the hill. "Thlee China boys are bury top side. If dlig up, devil catchum plenty bad. On'y can dlig up for take to China. Savvy?"

"What would that cost?" asked Pratt.

"Tlwo thousan' dollah," Ah Fu told him.

Pratt gave his large head a decisive shake. "Nothing doing," he said. "Your ten percent cut might not amount to a third that much. Devils, hell! You think I'm going to pass up this hill just because three dead chinks in their graves ain't to be disturbed?"

FOUR years before this time, Ah Fu had been foreman of the Chinese labor Enos Pratt had then employed. One bitter night of rain and wind, Ah Fu had taken three of his countrymen in a skiff and fought his way out into the raging waters of the Modoc to repair a break in a trestle. The skiff capsized. Ah Fu managed to save himself by riding a log, but his three countrymen washed up limply on a sandbar the next evening.

No one else blamed Ah Fu. But he blamed himself. The drowning of his three friends was heavy upon

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his soul. He thought, did Ah Fu at that time, in his innocence, that Enos Pratt would pay for shipping the bodies back to China for the only burial restful for Chinese bones. But Pratt had only laughed and told him to heave the dead chinks back in the river.

This tiny hill the three were standing on had been part of a ranch, and considered worthless. Ah Fu had bought it for fifty dollars and reverently interred the bodies of his deceased countrymen. After that he wouldn't work for Pratt. Instead, he went doggedly to work at the hill with a gold pan and water he lugged clear from the river. Another six years or so, he figured, and he would be able to take the bones of his friends to China, to be buried among the crumbling remains of their honorable ancestors. The weight would then be lifted from his own long-suffering soul.

But until that time, to disturb the temporary graves would be a violent outrage, a horrible desecration the mere thought of which curdled the feeble blood in old Ah Fu's hardened arteries. He shook his shriveled head till his queue writhed.

"No can do!" he squeaked.

The skinny man with Pratt drooped his right shoulder and sent a jet of tobacco juice hissing from the corner of his thin-lipped mouth. "You going to argue with the pigtailed little lizard all evening, boss?" he said. "Leave me mash him up a bit." The hired gun dog stepped clear of his boss' elbow.

"Hold it, Durkee!" Pratt said sharply.

Even at sundown, the heat here on the exposed hill made the sweat pop. It wasn't improving the mine owner's short temper any. His flabby face was the color of a chunk of iron ore. All pretense of friendliness vanished.

"Listen, chink!" he said savagely. "You come down to my bank in town and sign the papers by midnight, or I'll make you squirm worse than your pigtail's squirming now. D'you hear?"

Ah Fu opened his mouth. Zeke Durkee shut it with a back-handed swipe and the scrawny old Chinese rode his shoulder blades down into the bottom of the ditch he had been panning in.

Slowly Ah Fu crawled up the ditch bank. The rusty tomato can lay against a boulder. He got it. The few grains of gold that had rewarded his day's toil in the broiling sun of the Mother Lode were scattered.

The old Chinaman stood there unsteadily for a minute or two, wiping blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. His sun-bleached old eyes dumbly watched Pratt and Durkee disappear down the hill in the gathering dark. Then he turned and shuffled away.

But even in the extremity of his grief, even with a host of devils gnawing at the soul of him, Ah Fu was mindful of his regular evening chore.

Before going home to his lonely little shanty on the bank of the Modoc, he went to the railway station. Every evening for four years he had mopped out the station and swept the platform. It was thus he earned his scanty living. For no power under heaven could have prevailed upon him to use one tiny grain of the gold he washed from Graveyard Hill. That gold was the property of the friends who lay buried there. It was sacred.

Ribald old Red Lafferty was perched on a high stool with a shoeless foot on his desk, laughing till the tears ran down into his fiery

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whiskers and waving a whiskey bottle. With his toes he was confounding all the operators up and down the line by tapping out lewd jokes on the telegraph instrument.

He glanced at Ah Fu and squealed: "It's some stranger the riffraff will be thinkin' it is, bejabbers!" And he laughed till he fell off his stool.

Then he sobered and peered more closely into Ah Fu's wrinkled face. "And what species o' maggot is devourin' ye, me heathen Celestial?"

"Devils velly bad," sighed Ah Fu.

The waspish old station agent jerked a pistol from a drawer.

"Listen, me b'y," he squealed belligerently. "Divil or demon, fetch him hither. It's murther I'll commit!"

He patted Ah Fu reassuringly on the shoulder, then righted his stool and went back to his whiskey and jokes.

WHEN Ah Fu got to town after eating his rice, murky lamplight from windows of saloons, stores and dance halls made the dusty plank walks look like patchwork quilts. Shuffling along in his straw sandals, the old Chinaman slipped through the crowds of roistering miners like liquid through a sieve. To bump the elbow of a red-shirted Mother Lode miner could easily spell calamity. Ah Fu had seen inoffensive men of his race hung by their queues from barroom chandeliers for such crimes.

He found the town marshal, a beefy gentleman by name Ed Slatten, snoring in his tilted chair with his head propped against the wall. What there was of law in Bedrock woke up and surveyed the trembling little Chinaman with a disapproving eye, as though perhaps trying to weave him into the warp of an unfinished dream. Ah Fu blurted his tale in a few hurried words.

"Huh!" Slatten grunted. Without removing his sock feet from the desk, he fished a soggy cigar stub from a vest pocket.

The marshal's eyes were watery and flecked with blood, as if they'd been sprinkled with red pepper. His huge body bulged out beneath the arms of his chair. The peril of Ah Fu plainly concerned him about as much as the gnat circling above the sweaty dome of his hairless head.

"You can't buck Enos Pratt," he said flatly. "Pratt owns Bedrock. He owns the whole Bedrock district. He dang near owns me." The marshal solemnly spat halfway to the sawdust box. "You'd best take him up on his proposition." Sleep threatened again.

Ah Fu had a deep and abiding respect for the law. In the days of his childhood, in the mud-walled village on the banks of the far-off Yangtze Kiang, where he was born, he had been taught the sacred maxims of holy Confucius. Respect for authority was as the very blood in Ah Fu's veins. In token thereof, he had borrowed from his lifelong friend, Fong Low, a black sateen skullcap with a bright-red tassel on it.

He took off the cap, bowed low to the marshal, and once more stated gravely how impossible it was to desecrate the bones of his friends by disturbing them except for shipment to China. Then he smiled his wan smile.

"My fifteen years of marshalin'," Slatten grunted, "ain't give me a hell of a lot of respect for bones, human or divine." He started to yawn, stopped in the middle of it, let his feet fall suddenly off the desk. A crafty light crept into his speckled eyes.

"You got a deed to Graveyard

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Hill?" he demanded.

"Paper with writing," squeaked Ah Fu, and bobbed his head vigorously. "Plenty good!"

"Did you record it?"

The little Chinese gave the marshall a blank look.

"I mean," Slatten explained, "did you show it to the county clerk?"

Ah Fu smiled slyly. "Not show anyblody," he said. "Hidem good."

"Go get it!" Slatten ordered.

When Ah Fu got back, the marshal was in much better humor. He had lighted a fresh cigar. The neck of a bottle protruded from a partly closed drawer. The Chinaman took his precious document from inside the lining of his cotton jacket and handed it lovingly across the desk.

Slatten unfolded the yellowed paper and held it close to the lamp. After he had read it, he put it in a drawer of his desk and gave the drawer a slam. He regarded the watchful Ah Fu from beneath drooping eyelids.

"That there's absolute proof of your ownership, Ah Fu," he said, "morally, legally and spiritually. You leave it with me for safekeeping. With that piece of writing, we'll twist Pratt's tail. He lurched out of his chair and clapped a hand on Ah Fu's bony shoulder, knocking the little Chinaman clear out of his sandals.

"I'm with you from hell to breakfast, Ah Fu," he said boisterously. "You go home and rest easy."

Ah Fu bobbed his head respectfully and slid into his sandals. The thought of parting with his precious paper gave him a lost feeling in the pit of his stomach. But the marshal was the law. Ah Fu bowed three times and scampered away into the night, trying hard to feel glad.

INSTEAD of using the street, Ah Fu cut around through the brush south of town and padded homeward in a roundabout way, by way of Graveyard Hill. He would go and sit for a while, he thought, by the graves of his friends, take counsel with them.

But when he topped the low ridge running parallel to the river, he stopped as suddenly as if his sandals had struck quicksand. His knowing eyes saw in one scared glance exactly what was happening.

Pratt's entire night crew was rigging up a second hydraulic giant not more than a hundred feet from where the quaking Ah Fu crouched in the brush on the ridge top. Their purpose was plain.

Pratt didn't want to move his big flume and elevator and other equipment just to cut that little hill away. So his crew were rigging a second

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giant in such a position that the two giants, one cutting and the other driving, would handle the gravel just as well as if the flume and elevator had been moved.

It was clear to Ah Fu that, come hell or high water, Enos Pratt meant to start his giants roaring against Graveyard Hill the next morning. The Chinaman wondered where Pratt was. He wasn't long finding out.

Ah Fu went scurrying back to town to tell the marshal what was going on. But in the mouth of the alley that ran along the side of the lawman's office he stopped short, breathing hard.

Marshal Slatten and Enos Pratt were standing talking under the wooden awning in front of the Skylark Bar. The light shining from the bar windows made Slatten's bulbous nose look like an overripe purple fruit of the prickly pear. It also revealed that Pratt's face was wreathed in an oily smile. With fear clutching his heart, Ah Fu shrank back farther into the darkness of the alley and watched.

He heard both Slatten and Pratt laugh heartily. They shook hands, as if cementing an understanding, then separated. Pratt angled across the street in the direction of Graveyard Hill. The marshal passed within a step or two of the hidden little Chinaman and lurched into his office. He was chuckling.

Ah Fu did not follow to tell Slatten what was happening out at his hill. Something assured him that the marshal already knew—that he and the rich banker and mine owner were now hand in glove. He knew, did Ah Fu, that he might as well ask for the golden chariot in which the soul of Confucius had been borne aloft to heaven as to attempt to get his deed back. Humping his wasted shoulders, he shuffled away toward his shanty in the river brush.

But he did not stay there long.

In some mysterious way he could not have explained, Ah Fu became a changed man. He hunched on his three-legged stool there in the dilapidated shack he had fashioned from flattened kerosene tins, cupped his chin in his hand and looked around stonily.

In the wavering light of a candle stub stuck on a box, the cracked little wood stove he had salvaged from the town dump ground didn't look like his any more. The bunk he had built of driftwood, his blackened rice pot and dented tin dishes—all the meager possessions he had deemed ample for his simple needs, even the roof of brush thatch and mud that had protected his brittle old bones from the winter deluge of freezing rain, all seemed unimportant now.

The only thing that mattered now was that the dream that had so long sustained him—the dream of insuring the well-being of the immortal souls of his dead friends and countrymen by returning their remains to beloved Chinese soil—this dream was shattered and blown to the four winds by the wickedness dwelling in two men. It was likely too that devils had a hand in it.

But—and this was the subtle change that came over Ah Fu—if the aid of the law was denied him, then he would have to help himself. His narrow shoulders squared up. His pointed chin lifted. He clenched his gnarled hands and got busy.

The midnight appointment with Enos Pratt could be forgotten. Now that Slatten held Ah Fu's precious deed, leaving him with no proof whatever of ownership of Graveyard Hill, Pratt wouldn't care whether or not he signed any papers at the bank. The crooked banker was free to go

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ahead and blast the little hill into his flume.

From a box in a corner, Ah Fu got a wide-bladed wood chisel and with a file put an edge on it sharp enough to shave with. He also dug out a wooden mallet. Tearing strips from an old shirt, he wound them around the end of the chisel handle and the head of the mallet, and tied them securely with twine. Cocking his head sidewise, he brought the mallet down on the padded chisel. It scarcely made a sound. Ah Fu bobbed his head with satisfaction and smiled his sad smile.

LYING hidden in the brush on the ridge was cold work, but Ah Fu didn't mind. The night wind rattled the dry pods on a buckeye tree. A drifting owl, as silent as a breath, almost touched the tip of the motionless little Chinaman's snub nose. But Ah Fu's faded eyes never left the scene he was looking down upon.

Pratt's night crew was finishing their job of installing the second hydraulic giant, working by the light of kerosene flares that smoked and sputtered as the gentle night wind rose and fell. Off to the right, a feeble trickle of water was falling from the end of the nozzle, of the other giant. That told the shrewd Ah Fu all he needed to know.

The water Pratt used was brought from away up on the shoulder of Dead Dog Mountain, carried down through open ditches and across the flat west of town in a pipe line. The previous morning, the water had been cut from the line by the opening of a by-pass that spilled the stream into Wolf Creek. Thus the way was clear for clean-up of the gold in the flume and hooking up the new giant.

Ah Fu knew that when Pratt's men closed the by-pass again, it would take two hours for the water to flow through ditches and pipe line and reach the giants. Once more he smiled wanly.

It must have been about two o'clock when the men doused the lights, picked up their lunch buckets and came climbing up toward Ah Fu in a strung-out line, with the paunchy figure of Enos Pratt in the lead. Fifty feet below where Ah Fu lay concealed, the footpath swerved sharply to the left, toward town. As the crew filed wearily along, Pratt turned to the man behind him.

"Chunky," he said, "you'd best go up and close that by-pass yourself, then we'll be sure it's closed. I want that water roaring at seven o'clock."

Ah Fu waited till several minutes after the last footfall had faded, then wriggled noiselessly down the slope. Circling the new giant, he clambered over the pipe line and crossed the pit to where the twenty-foot elevator loomed specterlike at the head of the flume in the chill white light cast by a sliver of moon.

From inside the folds of his patched jacket he took his mallet and chisel, then climbed up into the flume and from there slid down feet-first into the yawning mouth of the elevator, easing his descent by hooking his bare heels over the frayed edges of the bull-pine blocks lining the elevator's bottom.

About three quarters of an hour later Ah Fu emerged, like a chipmunk from a knothole. He was breathing hard. Blood pounded in his ears. In his excitement he entirely forgot that the skullcap he had borrowed from Fong Low, the one with the red tassel, had fallen down the elevator into the pit beneath the grizzly.

At the alley door of Fong Low's laundry, Ah Fu rapped lightly, seven

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times. Fong Low opened the door, his padded quilt still wrapped around him, then closed the door and carefully barred it. He lighted a tin wall lamp. Then, being a man of good will, he moved a muslin curtain that hid some shelving and set a squat brown jug and two china cups without handles on the oilcloth-covered table.

Affairs of deep gravity take considerable time. False dawn was turning Fong Low's kitchen window blind the color of wet putty by the time Ah Fu had unburdened himself of his manifold woes in whispered Cantonese, and had fully informed the loyal laundryman of the part he was counted upon to play in forthcoming events.

It was while sipping a last cup of the delicious Tso Far Wen that Ah Fu let out a forlorn squawk. He had just discovered that the skullcap was missing. And it was too late to go back in search of it.

WHEN Ah Fu reached Graveyard Hill shortly after seven o'clock, he was apparently quite innocent of any knowledge of developments during the night. He descended the slope of the ridge at a shambling run, then stood and watched the new giant ripping and tearing at the foot of the hill. His mouth fell open. His eyes popped. His gnarled fingers frantically tied knots in his queue.

Enos Pratt climbed the tailrace and waddled over to where the Chinaman was standing by a rubble heap. The mine owner's yellow eyes were contemptuous, but they glinted with suspicion. He reached in his pocket and threw a wad of something at Ah Fu's feet. The little Chinaman glanced down and saw that it was what was left of the lovely skullcap he had borrowed from the trustful Fong Low. Stooping, he picked it up and tried to brush some of the grime off with the sleeve of his jacket.

"That yours?" Pratt demanded.

Ah Fu shook his head in doleful negative. He had worked for Pratt too long in the old days for the mine owner ever to suspect him of lying. Besides, Ah Fu's crushed appearance at sight of the giant blasting at his hill would have deceived even Confucius.

"Well, you tell every blasted, snooping chink you know to keep away from here," Pratt said angrily. "You don't own this hill any more than you own the moon. I own it. And listen!"

Ah Fu looked at him with the abject expression of a whipped spaniel.

"You get the bones of those blasted friends of yours off the top of this hill mighty quick! If you don't, they're going out into the Pacific Ocean."

Ah Fu bobbed his head hopelessly. "Savvy plenty good," he said.

The desecration couldn't be performed in daylight, under the leering eyes of infidel muckers in red-flannel shirts. But as soon as night had fallen, Ah Fu and Fong Low went to work.

With the giant roaring below them in the light of the kerosene flares, and a sickle of moon riding coldly above a veil of skudding clouds, the two old cronies worked away like a pair of desperate beavers. By means of the two-wheeled cart Fong Low used to deliver laundry, they managed to transport the coffins one by one down the hill and away. When dawn came, they had all three of the rough-pine boxes safely hidden in the laundryman's cellar.

It took Enos Pratt's crews five days and nights to tear down Grave-

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yard Hill and wash it through the flume. During those days, Ah Fu seemed to spend all his time watching with melancholy stoicism the destruction of his property. But, in truth, he came and went, mostly went.

He went to the lumberyard after dark and wheeled loads of pine boards back to the cellar beneath Fong Low's laundry. At intervals during the succeeding nights, he and his old friend worked industriously, making as little noise as possible with their hammers and saws. And during the last night before Pratt demolished the last of the hill, the two shriveled old Chinese, one pulling the cart and the other pushing, made four trips to the railway station.

And now, Ah Fu told Fong Low in cautious Cantonese, was come his time of sorest trial and tribulation, when his own immortal soul might go the way of the souls of all luckless Chinese who die in the lands of the heathen. Even Fong Low couldn't help Ah Fu now. What remained to be done, dangerous as it was, Ah Fu must do alone.

The hill was gone. The water was cut off. Enos Pratt ordered clean-up.

LYING in his hiding place on the ridge, Ah Fu watched the crew rake rocks and gravel from the long flume, pull the bull-pine blocks, pour quicksilver in at the flume's head and wash it gently along the flume with water hauled from the pit in tanks. He saw Chunky climb into the flume with a dustpan and a tin pail and start to capture gold-laden quicksilver with the dustpan and slosh it into the pail under the distrustful eyes of Pratt and Slatten.

Time was getting short. The moon had swung past the zenith. Ah Fu wriggled frantically inside his clothes. In about three hours the morning train would go through.

But at last the job was done, clean-up was over. With Chunky and another man carrying the tin pail, and Pratt and Slatten close behind, the crew climbed the ridge and disappeared.

Ah Fu knew what they would do. They would go to a room at the rear of Pratt's bank. There they would pour the contents of the pail into a large chamois and squeeze most of the quicksilver out, then put the remaining amalgam through a retort and see how much gold they had. For Ah Fu, it was now or never. He got stiffly to his feet and scrambled down the hill. That was his mistake.

He had counted positively on every man in the crew being gone. With a fire shovel and a leather sack in his hands, he clambered up into the flume and turned toward the elevator. Then he froze.

At first the thought a black bear had got into the flume and was pawing at something in the bottom. But the next instant, the burly bulk of a man reared up almost in his face, a man who had been left behind to gather up the last remaining blobs of quicksilver. The fellow had a long-handled shovel. This he swung with murderous intent.

Nothing but the fact that the shovel was long-handled preserved for further adventures the immortal soul of the fear-stricken Ah Fu. The handle caught under one of the flume's side supports.

Without thinking—with a power that was none of his own contriving whatever, but must have come from holy Confucius—Ah Fu swung his own iron fire shovel. And without any such intent on his part, the

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heavy shovel collided edgewise with the side of the burly miner's skull. He melted over the side of the flume, slid off the footboard, dropped gracefully to a rock pile ten feet below and landed on the top of his head.

SCANT minutes before the train pulled out, an avalanche struck the baggage car—an avalanche in the form of Enos Pratt, Marshal Slatten, Chunky Whatever-his-name-was, and a couple of dozen red-shirted members of Pratt's tough crew. Pratt's face was purple. Slatten's was the shade of sun-bleached green paint.

Waspish old Red Lafferty and the baggageman confronted the mob.

"What the devil are ye after?" yelped Lafferty.

"That chink robber!" choked Pratt. "That sneaking slit-eyed Ah Fu robbed my flume!"

"The thievin' spalpeen!" Lafferty squealed. "An' how in blazes did he do that, Mr. Pratt?"

"He cut the bottom block in the elevator down to half with a chisel or something," Pratt wailed, "and caught damn near all the gold I washed out of Graveyard Hill. Then when we left after the clean-up, he sneaked back and dug all that gold up out of the boil that formed below the cut block. I know it was him, because it was him like to brained my three-to-eleven straw boss."

"Why the Celestial divil would thieve the pinnies off his dead grandmither's eyes!" gasped Lafferty. "Have ye searched thim passenger coaches?"

"With a fine-toothed comb," Slatten grunted. "He couldn't be in here, could he?"

"Divil a Chinamin we got except in coffins," Lafferty swore, and pointed to the rear end of the car. "May their heathen souls rest in peace!"

Everybody peered at the four newly made pine coffins resting side by side in the semidarkness near the car's end. Enos Pratt waddled over and kicked contemptuously at the nearest one, then turned and looked at Slatten between puckered eyelids.

"I thought there wasn't but three of them chinks got drowned," he mused aloud.

"Could've been four," the marshal said disgustedly. "Nobody counts dead chinks."

The banker mopped sweat from his lurid face. "Could have been," he muttered.

The locomotive whistle screeched shrilly.

Ten minutes later, Ah Fu was teaching the baggageman how to play Chinese checkers. But his thoughts were far away. To the tune of the car's wheels on the rails, he was dreaming his dream.

He was back in holy China, was old Ah Fu, in an ancient village on the banks of the Yangtze River. The bones of his beloved friends rested peacefully in the soil of their homeland. He himself was quietly sitting in the sun.

THE END

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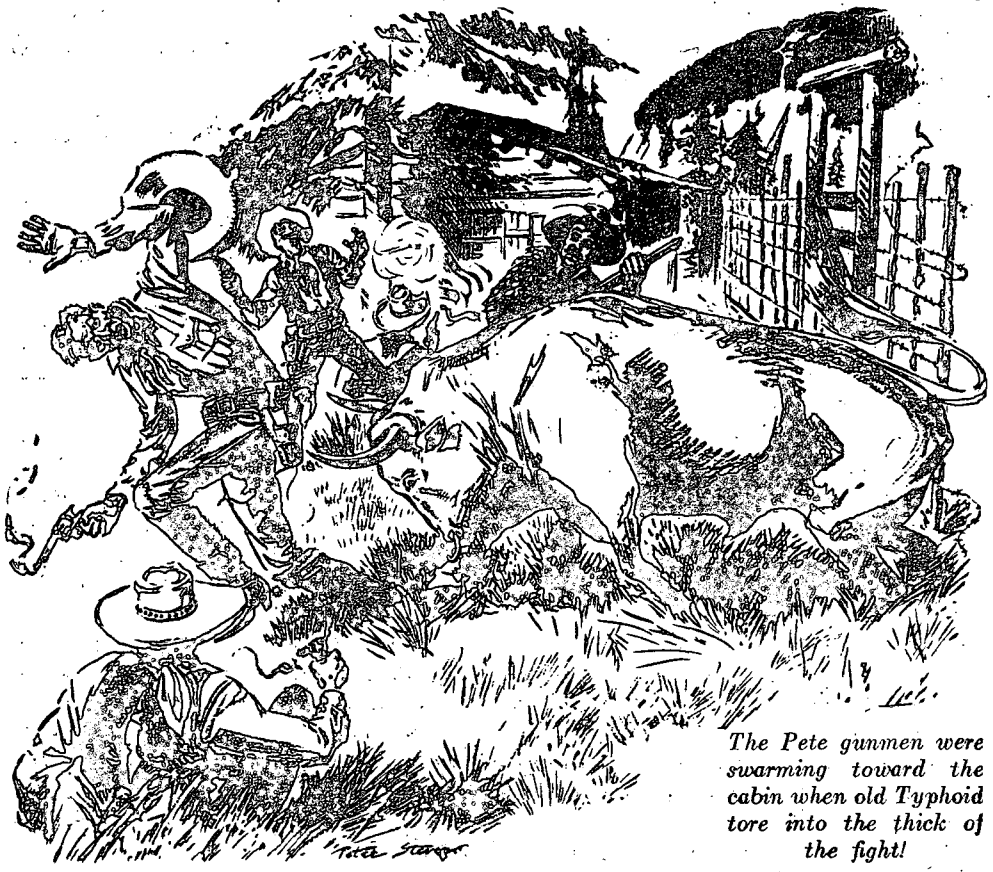

The Pete gunmen were swarming toward the cabin when old Typhoid tore into the thick of the fight!

$10,000 WORTH OF BULL

by Wayne D. Overholser

PHIL DANVERS felt mighty lucky and proud as he drove his new shorthorn bull down the slope to Red Pete's ferry. According to Phil's way of thinking, a man had a right to be proud when he owned his own spread, had a wife, a twelve-year-old boy, a sizable cow herd, and the best bull in central Oregon. Of course he'd only owned the Rafter O Bar for a month. It wasn't much yet, but it would be. There'd be some mighty good calves on the Rafter O Bar range next spring.

Phil ran a tongue over dry lips, and squinted westward to where the dying sun was kicking up its nightly froth of crimson. "Lily ought to be dishing it up about the time we turn old Typhoid here into the pasture," he remarked to young Darb Hatton.

"Sure hope so." Darb patted his lean stomach. He raised himself in his stirrups. "The ferry's coming over. Reckon we'll hit it about right."

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"She's running powerful big and deep," Phil nodded at the brown waters of the Corkscrew.

"Higher than the Deschutes," Darb said. "Must've had a cloudburst upstream."

They moved on toward the river, the bull walking dejectedly, head down.

"Old Typhoid ain't got much vinegar left in him," Darb grinned.

"He'll come out of it," said Phil. "A little rest and grass'll fix him pronto. Keep him coming, Darb. I'll ride on down and tell Pete to wait for us."

"Shucks he can see us."

"Yeah," Phil grunted, "he can see us, but there's no telling what that ornery cuss'll do."

Phil went past the bull in a trot, and reached the river just as the ferry was nosing into the bank. A buckboard came off. Phil nodded at the driver as the rig clattered by, and rode on to the ferry.

"Wait for that bull, Red," Phil gestured back toward Darb and the shorthorn.

Red Pete stared at Phil. Then, turning his head, he spat into the river. He was a yellow-eyed, hatchet-faced man with a snaky way about him that Phil hadn't liked from the time he'd first seen him.

"I ain't taking no bull over," Pete said harshly.

"My money's good, ain't it?" Phil demanded.

"Nothing's wrong with your money, I reckon," Pete grunted. He slapped his right leg that was two inches shorter than his left. "A damned bull busted that leg. I ain't taking no chances. Swim him over."

PHIL looked at the swirling water, and shook his head. "Nothing doing. That bull's hot and tired. He's cost me too much to risk shoving him into that water when there's a ferry empty and waiting. You're supposed to be running a public boat."

Pete took a tooth-frayed plug of tobacco out of his pocket and filled his mouth. "Public or not, Danvers, I ain't taking no bull."

Darb had brought Typhoid to the bank. He stopped now, and sat grinning at Phil. "What's the matter, boss? Has Red got an ornery streak on again?"

Phil angrily whirled his mount and rode off the ferry. "He's ornery all right, but he's taking that bull across whether he likes it or not. Drive him on, Darb."

"I wouldn't do that," Pete snarled, "was I you."

There was a warning in the ferryman's voice that made Phil turn his head. Red Pete held a double-barreled shotgun in his hand and was pointing it squarely at the motionless bull.

"Put that scattergun down," Phil roared. "This critter's too tired to bother you."

"Don't make no difference," rasped Pete. "No bull's coming on this boat. You move him another step, and I'll fill him full of buckshot. Then you won't have nothing but a chunk of beef on yours hands, Danvers."

For a moment they were that way, while anger rose in Phil Danvers until his lips were white. Red Pete was the kind of a polecat to do just what he threatened.

Suddenly Darb laughed. "Well, you two can stand here arguing all day. I'm hungry. I'm going on over and see what Mrs. Danvers fixed up for supper."

"Ain't none of you coming on this boat." Pete spat into the river again. "Not after the kind of gab you been passing out."

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"I'll take the river, then," Darb said good-humoredly. "I'll tell the missus you're coming, boss."

Before Phil could open his mouth to tell Darb to wait, the puncher had put his roan into the shallow water below the ferry.

"If anything happens to Darb," Phil told Pete grimly, "I'll gun you down like I would any varmint."

Pete eared back the hammers of his shotgun. "You're talking mighty high for a gent who's facing a dose of buckshot."

"This bull's going across, and he ain't swimming," Phil said softly. "Take a look behind you, Pete, and you'd better let them hammers down. Darb wouldn't miss a target as big as you."

"I'll say I wouldn't," Darb grinned. He had pulled his roan in beside the ferry, and had grabbed the railing. Now his Colt was lined on Red Pete's back. "I don't cotton to shooting a gent from the rear, Pete, but this is different. They wouldn't even arrest me. I reckon the State legislature would vote me a right handsome reward for removing a dangerous reptile."

Pete stepped back until he could see Darb. In that instant Phil's gun appeared in his hand. "Don't get any ideas about picking one of us off, or you'll get a dose of lead poisoning. I won't miss, either."

Pete lowered the hammers and let his shotgun drop, his yellow eyes filled with hate. "You've topped my hand, Danvers, but I'll get you. I'll get you as sure as water boils in Hades."

Phil rode on to the ferry, swung down from his saddle and picked up the shotgun. He heaved it overboard into the brown water, then stepped back into his saddle and drove the bull onto the boat.

"All right, Darb," he called. "Looks like you won't have to swim that roan across."

Darb swung his mount around and splashed back to the bank. "You ain't so tough, Pete," he told the ferryman. "Not near as tough as you figure you are."

RED PETE didn't answer. He stood as far from the bull as he could get, mouthing inarticulate curses. When the ferry swung into the east bank and Darb had driven the bull off the boat, Phil asked: "How much?"

"Fifty dollars," Pete snapped.

"I ain't paying for that scattergun," Phil said evenly, and tossed a gold eagle at Pete's feet. "That ought to be plenty." He whirled his sorrel and followed Darb up the steep bank.

"I ain't done with you, Danvers," Red Pete yelled after him. "By Satan, I'll make you—" The rest of his ranting was lost as Phil swung in beside Darb.

"Well, old Typhoid's over," Darb grinned. Then he sobered. "This Pete outfit's been meaner'n a bunch of hydrophoby skunks ever since we moved into the Rafter O Bar. What do you figure's eating on them?"

"Plenty," Phil answered grimly. "I've been smelling something that's a dang sight bigger'n a rat."

Phil didn't say anything more while they were riding past the Pete buildings. Red had two younger brothers, Jake and Dude. Of the two, Jake was bigger, but outside of that, he and Dude looked a lot alike. Each had a pair of sharp, fanglike teeth protruding from his lower jaw, and a mop of tousled, reddish-brown hair. Because Red was the oldest and the meanest, he was the leader of the brothers. They reminded Phil

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of a trio of coyotes constantly on the alert for something weaker they could drag down.

Each of the Pete brothers had a certain part of the business that he managed. Red the ferry, Jake the cattle that carried the Pete 7M brand, and Dude the trail-side hotel that he ran in the big ranchhouse. Because there was no other settlement within twenty miles, Dude did pretty well.

A lot of evil yarns were told along the river about the thieving and murdering the Petes did, and their slickness in getting away with their crimes. Talk, too, about how any hard case on the dodge could hide out and draw a few months' wages riding the bluffs above the east bank of the Corkscrew for Jake Pete. Before Phil had bought the Rafter O Bar he hadn't taken any stock in these yarns, but he knew better now.

After he and Darb had ridden past the Pete buildings and corrals and started the stiff climb that led to the Rafter O Bar, Phil said: "Looks to me like the Petes don't want nobody living on the Rafter O Bar. I'd say we were in for some pretty bad trouble with 'em."

"Why do you think so?" Darb asked curiously.

"Old man Monroe must have had trouble, or he wouldn't have built his log house into a regular fort like he did. Besides, he was too anxious to sell. I got the Rafter O Bar all-fired cheap. Then it ain't natural the way the Petes have been treating us. We're the only neighbors they've got within ten miles. Begins to look like I was a blind fool for bringing Lily and Skeeter in here."

Darb patted his six-gun. "A dose of lead will put a stop to most any cussedness. I reckon the Petes won't hurt the button or the missus."

As they topped the last rise and came within view of the house, young Skeeter saw them, and came down the trail on a wild gallop atop his Keeno horse. He waved his hat and yelled: "Howdy, dad. Howdy, Darb."

"Look out for the bull, Skeeter," Darb yelled back. "He's a bad one."

"How are you, son?" Phil smiled as the boy reined in beside them. There was pride in Phil Danvers, pride in the way Skeeter handled his horse, pride at the man his son was becoming.

"Mighty good." Skeeter's freckled face cracked into a wide grin. He looked at the bull and shook his head. "He don't look bad to me. Tomorrow I'm gonna throw a rope on him and ride him."

"I'll skin you alive if you try it," Phil said sternly. "Typhoid's got the name of being mighty bad medicine for any two-legged critter he catches on foot. He's just tired now."

"Say, dad," Skeeter faced his father, "we lost all our turkeys last night."

"Lost 'em?" Phil asked. "What happened?"

"Some of the Pete outfit sneaked in and got away with 'em, Mike says."

"What was the matter with Nip? Lost his bark?"

"Dead." Skeeter tried to keep the tears back, but didn't quite succeed. "Mike says he was poisoned."

"Looks like we won't be having turkey for Thanksgiving," Phil commented somberly. "Shove Typhoid into the pasture above the house, Darb. We'll turn him out on the range after we get the cows cut out."

Mike McCarty came out of the barn as Phil rode in and swung down. Mike was a grizzled old puncher twice Phil's age, loyal,

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tough and with more cow savvy than any rider Phil had ever hired.

"What's this about the turkeys and Nip?" Phil demanded.

"Gone," Mike said sourly. "Two nights ago. Didn't hear a thing, but in the morning Nip was stiffer'n a side of bacon, and the turkeys was gone. There was tracks around the pen. Looked like two men, one of 'em crippled."

"It's the devil of a note," Phil said angrily as he stripped his sorrel and hung the saddle on a peg, "that the only neighbors we got are them Pete hellers. Jake's got enough crew to slaughter the bull, rustle us blind, and burn every building we got. I wouldn't put anything past 'em to get us out of here."

That night after Skeeter had gone to bed, Phil told his wife what had happened at the ferry.

"If I'd had any sense, I'd have known we was getting this spread too cheap," he said ruefully. "The Petes are too mean to have paid old man Monroe anything for the layout. Now if we pull out, we'll lose everything we've got invested. And if we stick, it's hard to tell what'll happen to you and Skeeter."

Lily Danvers got up from her chair and laid a hand on her husband's shoulder. She was a tall, shapely woman with the flower of youth still upon her, and the courage in her face that this land gave to its womenfolks.

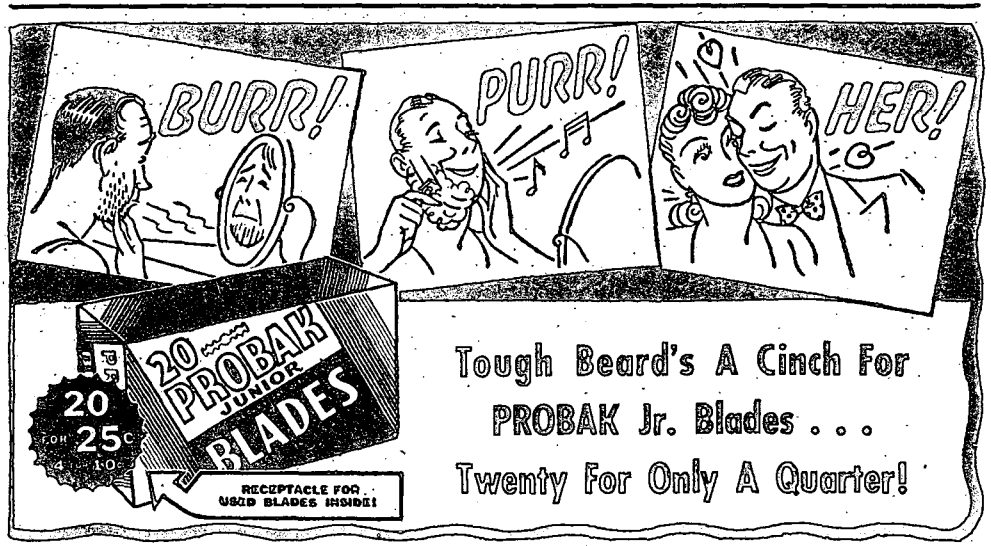
"Phil," she said softly, "you said there was a fortune here for us. We'll stick and make that fortune. Skeeter and I can take care of ourselves."

Phil squeezed her hand. The same pride he'd felt when he saw Skeeter ride down the trail that evening was in him again. Everything that a man could ask for from life was his.

"Me or one of the boys'll be around all the time," he said. "Just be careful, and don't let Skeeter ride off by himself."

FOR a week nothing happened. Darby and Mike rode the rough country back of Corral Mountain, throwing the cattle into the flats so that the cows could be cut out. By the end of the week most of the Rafter O Bar stock had been gathered.

"Another day'll do it," said Mike.



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"That's good," Phil declared. "It's time we were getting that bull out on the range. Might be several days yet, though, before we're ready to move him. I still haven't got all his pasture fence fixed. He's getting meaner every day. He could go through that bobbed wire if he picked the spot."

The next morning while Phil was working on the pasture fence he heard the hoof thunder of a rapidly approaching horse. Looking up, he saw Darb come tearing down the slope for all his roan was worth.

"They done it," Darb yelled. "Scattered our gather all the way from hell to breakfast. Mike's rode over behind the Corral Mountain to see how far they've gone. He said I'd better tell you."

Phil cursed long and loud. "I don't want to take another week to do all of this over again. Lily and Skeeter can ride. If the beef's still together, the five of us can chouse 'em back down by night."

Within fifteen minutes Lily and Skeeter were in the saddle and headed for Corral Mountain with Phil and Darb. It was noon by the time they found Mike.

"It ain't so bad," the oldster told them. "They didn't do a very good job. Just choused 'em over the ridge and left 'em purty much in a bunch." He grinned at Skeeter and Lily: "With the crew we got now, we ought to get 'em back by night."

Mike was right. By late afternoon most of the herd was down in the flats again.

"We'd better stay here with 'em, boss," Mike said.

Phil hesitated. What he had really expected was for the Petes to tackle the ranchhouse, maybe try to burn the buildings. But last night's happenings tended to disprove his theory.

"All right," he said finally. "Come with us and get some chuck, Darb. Then you and Mike stay here till you get 'em all down."

The light was beginning to thin by the time the four of them rode into the ranch yard. It was Darb who saw Typhoid, and probably he wouldn't have looked in the bull's direction if he hadn't heard the tag end of a stentorian bellow.

"Something's wrong with Typhoid," Darb said, and raised himself in the stirrups. "Hey, he's got something treed, sure as I'm a foot high."

Phil looked, and began to laugh. Typhoid was under a pine tree, pawing up the dirt and tossing his wicked head.

"He's got something, all right," Phil chuckled. "I might be wrong, but it's my guess we'll find a Pete up that pine. Skeeter, get your mother some wood." After the boy had gone, Phil said: "Let's go see. Keep your hog leg handy."

As they rode up they saw a man halfway to the top of the pine. The bull reluctantly retreated before them, still keeping his head down and rumbling his defiance. Then Phil saw that his guess had been right. The man in the tree was Red Pete.

"What're you doing up there?" Phil demanded.

Pete didn't say anything. Darb couldn't hold himself any longer. He held his middle and howled with laughter. When he could get his breath, he gasped: "Looks to me, Red, like that bull knew you was aiming to make him swim the other day."

"I asked you what you're doing up there?" Phil shouted.

"What the devil do you think I'm doing up here?" Pete snarled. "I

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was getting out of that critter's way."

"You're kind o' off your range," Phil told him. "How come you got inside the fence?"

"I was trying to save a quarter of a mile," Pete mumbled, and dropped stiffly to the ground. "Let me up behind you, Danvers," he pleaded. "Get me out of here."

"If I was the kind of a whelp you are," Phil said grimly, "I'd let you stay in that tree."

"I wouldn't do that to you," Pete shrieked. "Get me out of here."

"Escort him to the gate by the house," Phil told Darb.

Typhoid kicked up another cloud of dust that drifted toward Pete, and bellowed. Pete took one look at the enraged bull, and started for the fence on a dead run, Darb following behind and laughing so hard he almost fell out of the saddle.

Phil began riding in circles around the tree, and presently he found what he was looking for. A .30-30 shell dropped in the grass about fifty feet from the tree. Phil swung down and picked it up. He rode over to the bull, examined him closely, then swung his sorrel and caught the others just as Darb was opening the wire gate.

"You start down that road, Pete," Phil said with grim fury. "If I see you or any of your outfit on my land, start pulling your gun."

Red Pete glared at Phil, his yellow eyes malevolent. "I'm not done, Danvers. You'll live to cuss the day you ever bought the Rafter O Bar." He moved then, down the road as fast as his legs could carry him.

"He came up here to kill Typhoid, all right," Phil told Darb. "The bull's got a bullet slash across the top of his skull, and looks like another clipped off the end of one horn. Pete's bronc is probably around here somewhere. My guess is that Pete rode up to the pasture on the other side from the house. He probably spotted Typhoid through the pines, and thought he'd sneak up and get a closer shot. About that time Typhoid must have spotted him."

"And Red got buck fever. Bull fever, I mean," chuckled Darb. "Next time he goes bull hunting he'll stay on a horse."

"I'd better find his bronc," Phil said. "You get the grub and light out, Darb. I'll be over day after tomorrow. Looks like I'd better take on about ten good hands. Three of us can't run a ranch and keep a guard on things, too."

"I've got a feeling," Darb said thoughtfully, "that we'll have a showdown plumb soon."

DARB had guessed nearer the truth than either he or Phil knew. The showdown did come soon, and in a manner that Phil never suspected. It came the next evening. Lily, Skeeter and Phil were eating supper when the boy looked out of a side window.

"Company," he shouted. "A covered wagon. What d'you think of that, dad?"

"I don't like it. You stay here, Skeeter." Phil looked warningly at his wife. "Bolt the doors and get some rifles down. This may be a snake trick." He picked up his Winchester and went out.

"Hello the house," a man called from the wagon.

The sun was to Phil's back, and fell full upon the face of the man in the wagon. Phil held up a hand to shade his eyes. He saw that the visitor was a stranger, and that he was scared.

Phil walked up to the wagon. From the dust on the tired horses and the weather-frayed canvas, he

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judged that the man had come a long way today. This was no trick, and yet it struck Phil as being odd that the man hadn't stayed with the Petes since they made a business of putting up travelers.

"Howdy, stranger," Phil said pleasantly, and leaned his Winchester against a corral post. "Climb down. Supper's on the table."

The man stepped down stiffly and held out his hand. "I'm Lige Jordan," he said. "I'd sure be obliged if you could put me up tonight.'

"You bet." Phil shook the man's hand. "Plenty of beans and bacon. Let's jerk the harness off. Looks like you been pushing your team purty hard."

"Too hard," Jordan said. "I came over the Santiam Pass from Albany. Got a load of trading stuff here. I'd heard of a couple of places that needed a store, but they didn't pan out so good when I looked 'em over."

Phil was a good judge of men, and this Jordan looked all right. He was middle-aged with a slight stoop to his shoulders, and his honest gray eyes were clouded with fear.

"You'll probably think it's purty queer that I didn't stay down on the river," Jordan said as they stood watching the horses drink, "but I didn't like the looks of things. It's the Pete outfit, ain't it?"

Phil nodded. "A coyote pack. They're giving us plenty of trouble."

"Not as much as we're going to," a hard voice cut in.

Phil and Jordan whirled. Neither had heard Jake Pete ride up. He was glowering down at them, a drawn six-gun in his hand.

"Get off my land," Phil warned. "I told Red yesterday I'd gun the first one of your outfit I saw on the Rafter O Bar."

Jake snickered, lips drawing away from his fanglike teeth. "You ain't in no position to gun nobody. Long as you tended to your cows, we ain't bothered you, but when you go to stealing our hotel business, that's going too far. Harness up them nags, and send this pilgrim back down the road. We got plenty of grub and beds at our place."

"You haven't bothered us," Phil said ironically. "Not much. You just steal our turkeys, stampede our beef, try to keep from ferrying my bull across the river. And then to top that Red comes up here figuring on killing the bull."

"Hogwash!" Jake grunted. "You can't prove nothing. Come on, hombre. Harness up that team and get to rolling."

Phil shot a glance at his rifle. It was twenty feet away. He had about as much chance of getting to it as one of his turkeys had of flying back to the Rafter O Bar.

"A man's got a right to stay where he wants to," Jordan said sullenly.

Jake Pete eared back the hammer of his gun. "Not in this country he ain't. You're coming—"

A rifle cracked from the house. Pete never finished the sentence. He dropped his gun, grabbed at his bullet-torn shoulder. His drooping body slid out of the saddle as Phil streaked for his Winchester. Then all hell broke loose. Guns roared. Bullets screamed their hideous death song past Phil's ears. In that one powder-blasting second he realized what had happened. Jake had sneaked up and held their attention while the rest of the Pete crew had circled around the ranch yard.

"Hit for the house," Phil yelled.

IT wasn't far to the house, but a long way in a moment with the air filled with shrieking lead. Phil felt a slug tug at his ear. Another burned its fiery path across his left

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thigh. They were almost to the front door of the house when Jordan stumbled and fell. Phil stopped, and helped the man to his feet.

"Another three steps," Phil said, and knew he'd been hit again under his right arm.

Somehow Jordan struggled to his feet. They reached the front door and stumbled in. Lily slammed the door behind them and dropped the heavy bar.

"You know, Phil," she said calmly, "old man Monroe knew what he was about when he built this house. The Petes will need a cannon to break down one of our doors."

Phil sat up and grinned. This was the kind of a wife to have.

"Who slipped Jake the slug?" he asked.

"I did," Skeeter shouted from where he was crouched beside a window.

"Good shooting, son." He turned to Jordan. "Where you hit?"

Jordan was holding a hand over a blood-spurting hole in his side.

"They're after the gold," he said thickly. "I should've guessed what they'd do."

"What gold?" Phil demanded.

"In my wagon. I had it hidden in a false bottom in the floor. I didn't have enough dinero to pay that red-headed tough hand for ferrying me across the river. I had to get into the wagon to get some, and when I turned around, Pete was watching me. He saw what I had."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

Phil whistled. "No wonder they're making their play."

Lily came out of the kitchen with a pan of hot water and some cloths. "I'll patch him up," she said. "Are you hit, Phil?"

"Just scratches." Phil picked up his rifle. "It's been coming. I should have had sense enough to keep Mike and Darb around."

Slowly he made a round of the house. "Keep away from the windows," he warned Skeeter. "Poke out some chinking and shoot between the logs."

There were five of the Pete outfit, as near as Phil could tell. They had crawled through the tall grass until they were above the house and just below the pasture fence that held the bull. They kept changing positions so that nobody in the house could get a stationary target. Phil poked out a piece of chinking, and for a time watched them. Then he went over to where Lily was working on Jordan.

"Looks pretty bad," he said in a low voice so Skeeter wouldn't hear. "No use figuring on Mike or Darb coming. They're too far away to hear the shooting. When it gets dark the Pete bunch'll rush us. Maybe burn the house. There won't be much we can do."

Lily was finished with Jordan. "Here, let me see how your scratches are." She slit Phil's shirt, examined the shoulder wound, then washed and bandaged it.

WHEN Lily was done, she sat back. "After it gets dark, I'll sneak out, get a horse and go for Mike and Darb," she declared. "Think you can hold out?"

Phil nodded. He didn't say so, but he knew they couldn't. One man who couldn't sit up and hold a gun, another man with a shoulder that throbbed like hell, and a twelve-year-old boy. No, there wasn't a chance. But he managed a weak grin. "Sure, we'll hold out. All we need is reinforcements."

"I'll get them, Phil," Lily said softly. "There's no moon tonight. I'll get through."

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"Good girl." Phil patted her hand. No word of blame. Just sheer raw courage in this woman who was his wife. Whatever happened, it would be better for her to be out of the house when the finish came.

"Dad," Skeeter cried hoarsely, "old Typhoid's on the tear."

Phil crawled across the floor, and put his eyes to the hole between the logs. What he saw brought a grin to his pain-twisted lips. The shooting had made the bull go crazy. He was ramming into the fence just above the gate, head down, his mighty bellowing rising above the gunfire. Phil had restapled most of the fence and stretched another wire, but he hadn't had time to fix that south line, and that was where Typhoid was trying to get through.

Then the bull was through, and Red Pete made his mistake. He must have gone as crazy with fear as the big bull had, for when he saw the lumbering giant plow his way through the fence, Red jumped to his feet and started to run. Typhoid saw him, and charged straight for the spot where the Pete gun crew was lying. They scattered like leaves in front of a twister. Phil shoved his rifle barrel through the hole, and pressed trigger. Skeeter was firing, too.

Phil saw Dude Pete stumble and go down. Another man stopped in midstride, wobbled, and pitched into the grass. Slugs caught a third and fourth one, sending them crashing to the ground. Jake Pete, holding his wounded shoulder, almost got clear before Phil caught him in his sights, and sent him to a stumbling death. Then, through horror-filled eyes, Phil saw Typhoid lower his head, slam his mighty horns into the inert body of Red Pete. Phil turned away from the sickening sight.

"I guess that about does it," he said somberly. "The Petes are through."

Lily leaned against the door jamb, her face suddenly white now that the danger was over.

"What happened?" she breathed.

"Typhoid got out of the pasture and busted 'em into the open."

Skeeter was grinning broadly. "I guess old Typhoid got us out of that one, didn't he, dad?"

"He sure did, son. You saddle up and ride over to Mike and Darb. Tell 'em the Petes won't be bothering no more cattle."

Typhoid disappeared down the hill at a slow trot. Phil circled the house and examined the Pete gang. The three Petes were dead. Two of their gun hands were hit hard but still alive. Phil carried them into the house.

"I'll go to town for the doc," he told Lily. "When Darb and Mike get here, have them round up Typhoid and put him back in the pasture. They'll have to mend the fence where he got out." He stopped beside the bed where Lige Jordan lay. "You know I've been thinking. You won't find a better place for a store than the river crossing here. You'll probably be able to get a good buy on the whole outfit now. The only Pete that's alive is a sister. Maybe I could rent the range if you didn't want to bother with running cattle."

"Sure," Jordan nodded weakly. "I reckon we could arrange that."

Lily had come to Phil and put her arm around him. "No more fighting," she said softly.

"That's right." Phil smiled down at her. "I'm sure lucky. The bravest wife and boy a man ever had, a good spread, and the meanest, best bull in central Oregon."

THE END.

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The mighty ram was at home on the peaks—would the towering crags let him be killed by man?

MOUNTAIN MONARCH

by Jim Kjelgaard

THOUGH most of them were hundreds of years old, the few trees that grew this high on the mountain were stunted, bent, wind and weather-beaten things scarcely as tall as a man's head. Progressively down the mountain the trees grew thicker and bigger to shade into the green of the real forest line. And though down below the mellow warmth of early autumn prevailed, up here a stinging wind constantly blew.

The big gray mountain sheep that lay placidly chewing his cud just under the highest part of the rocky peak let his eyes stray from time to time down the mountain. A royal ram with a great sweeping curve of horns that bent over his shoulders to come back and form almost a perfect circle, he rested secure in his bed. His telescope eyes saw nothing about which to be alarmed.

He had not glanced up because danger never came from above. Therefore he had not seen the hawk.

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A mere speck in the cloudless blue sky, the hawk had been following the ram for an hour. Like the sheep's, his eyes were marvels of telescopic vision. From breathless heights they could discern the marmots, rabbits and birds on which the hawk lived. But the game had to be in motion before the hawk could see it and this morning, for some reason, all the small game was hanging motionless close to the thickets and rocks.

The hawk was hungry and had hunted for two hours without sighting anything. When he had discovered the ram, at that time grazing in a patch of sparse mountain grass, he had hovered over it knowing that sooner or later it must come close to and flush a rabbit or marmot from its hiding place. Now that the ram was lying down, the hawk had set his wings and was soaring in tireless circles above its bed. Sooner or later the ram must get up again and go on. The hawk had the patience to wait until it did.

At length, despite the fact that he could see no danger, smell none, and hear only the constant whine of the wind, a little uneasiness stirred in the ram. It was a sort of sixth sense that all wild animals who live long enough develop, and that has been lost to the civilization-dulled perceptions of humans.

Turning his head, the ram stared steadily down the mountain.

With perfect clarity he saw everything on it. Around and for a long way below him there were only the gray boulders, the stunted trees and the wind-tortured patches of mountain grass. Below them were the larger trees, and still farther down was the unbroken tree line. The ram could make out the texture of the bark and the individual needles on the farthest trees.

He rose to his feet and looked across to the next mountain. He could still distinguish definite objects there—objects that, to the ordinary eye, would have been only a blur of color and a confused pattern of angles. There was nothing alarming in sight but still the ram was uneasy.

He walked to the top of the crag and stood silhouetted against the sky while his eyes swept the country all around. The other side of the crag was only a shallow dip that rose to another peak, and there were only a few stunted trees growing in it. Seeing every particle of the terrain, the ram knew for a certainty that no peril intervened between himself and the top of the next peak.

Turning again, the ram for a long time stared steadily back down at the timber line. Nothing moved and nothing showed. For a full ten minutes the ram stood still, moving only his head as his eyes roved from place to place. Then he went down into the dip and started toward the next peak.

The hawk wheeled over him as he walked.

DOWN in the forest, George Barlow took the binoculars from his eyes and rose from behind the tree trunk where he had been crouching ever since, on his way up the mountain, he had seen the ram in his bed. Being careful that the sun did not shine on the lenses, and so throw any telltale reflections back to the ram, Barlow had thrust the glasses through an opening in the trees that was just big enough to receive them. And what he had seen through those glasses still left him a little breathless.

For a moment he leaned against the tree, staring down at the rifle

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that stood near him. There *couldn't* be such a ram! But he had seen it. To a man who lived for record heads, who devoted his life to collecting them, there was no more precious find. And, now that he had found it, he must have that head.

A tingling little eagerness and a great hunter's ecstasy swept through Barlow as his memory painted and repainted for him every detail of the great ram. The glasses he was using were about equal to the ram's eyes, and he had missed nothing. But overshadowing everything else was the magnificent curl and sweep of those mighty horns.

He glanced ruefully down at his rifle. A lever-action, open-sighted .303, he hadn't dared try a shot with it at such a distance—the ram had been at least five hundred yards away. If he had shot and missed, the ram would have been gone beyond all possible hope of another shot. If he had only brought his 'scope-sighted .30-06! But when he had left the camp, it had been solely with the intention of picking up a deer for camp meat. He hadn't expected to find a ram like this, a prize that even his wildest hopes had never dared let him picture.

For a moment Barlow considered going back to camp and getting the heavier rifle. But he decided against it. The ram might leave these peaks while he was gone. Descending the mountain and climbing it again might make some noise that would frighten the animal out of rifle range, or a hundred other things might happen. The ram was located now. If Barlow could get within reasonable shooting distance, say three hundred yards, he could bring him down with the .303 anyway.

Barlow was well aware that he would need all the hunting skill at his command, and that one shot was probably all he would get. A ram as big as this one got that way only because he was a past master at evading enemies. This section of the Genading Mountains was isolated and remote. But no place in the world was so inaccessible that men did not go there. Plenty of hunters must already have tried to bring the ram down.

THERE was little concealment between the tree line and the top of the mountain. Barlow climbed to the top as rapidly as he could. He had seen the ram go down the other side, and did not think that the animal would come back up. But, in case he did, the rifle was held ready for any chance shot that might offer. If the ram knew that there was a hunter on his trail, he would be gone

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beyond any hope of overtaking him.

Ten feet below the crag's peak Barlow dropped to his hands and knees, and, holding the rifle off the ground with one hand, crawled the remaining distance. He slunk up behind a big boulder and peered cautiously around it.

Bare of all but stunted trees and shrubs, the peak dropped sharply into a shallow dip that leveled out and ran for about a quarter of a mile before it rose into another peak. Barlow's eyes traveled along it, searching out every boulder, every tree, every bunch of grass. On those barren mountainsides where even a mouse would apparently find difficulty in discovering an adequate hiding place, mountain sheep had an amazing facility for effacing themselves. However, Barlow finally assured himself that the ram was not on the level saddle.

His eyes roved on, up the opposite peak and again he examined thoroughly everything in sight. At first disappointment gripped him when he failed to see his game. He had noticed the little signs of alarm when the ram left his bed. But he had guessed that the animal was only uneasy instead of frightened, and that he would not travel far. By every sheep rule known to Barlow, the ram should be in sight.

Barlow took the field glasses from the inside of his brown woolen hunting shirt and again subjected the level saddle between the peaks to a minute examination. Looking through the glasses, his gaze climbed on up the other peak. He smiled in satisfaction when at last he saw the ram, or rather, his horns.

The ram was standing behind a huge boulder whose color matched exactly the gray of his hide. But the tops of his curling horns showed above the boulder. Barlow focused the glasses on them, and again felt his breath leave him as he noted their true size. He knew that the average hunter tends to exaggerate the size of any game he sees and, coming up the hill, he had assured himself over and over again that, though this was a mighty ram, no sheep could have horns so big. But here they were in plain sight again, and they were even bigger than he had at first thought them.

Then, glancing up, Barlow saw a hawk, a mere speck in the sky, wheeling high over the ram.

AFTER this one glance upward, the hunter ducked behind the rock again. He knew that the ram only appeared to be hidden behind the boulder. Actually, he was, no doubt, standing or lying on some little eminence from which he could see the country all around him, and where he could not be seen from exactly this angle. If he glanced this way, as he certainly would from time to time, he would see either the man's head or the glasses and be gone.

Barlow crawled twenty feet back down the mountain and for a moment sat with his gun across his knees. A wild exultation and an eagerness he had never known before pounded through him. The ram would certainly be the prize of his collection. It would excel by far his antelopes, kodiaks, lions, samburs—all the two hundred mounted specimens that made up the Barlow room at the museum. The man forced himself into some semblance of calmness. He wanted the ram mightily. But he must not let overeagerness spoil his chances for a shot at it.

Again Barlow glanced at the top of the crag. A hundred feet to one side, two storm-beaten little spruces grew almost together. Their trunks were gnarled and bent, with the tops

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of the trees almost touching the ground. But their branches, though not long, were bushy and full-needled. Barlow crawled up to them, and with two fingers of his right hand pulled a branch aside to make a space big enough for his eyes.

From here the ram could be seen plainly without the aid of glasses. Barlow watched the animal hungrily, avidly. The ram was standing out of the wind just below the crest of the peak. There were no hints of nervousness about him, none of the little signs of alarm that had made him leave his first bed.

Despite his eagerness to be on with the hunt, Barlow knew that he must wait. If he so much as thrust a hand up from behind these little trees, the ram might see it and be gone. It was absurd even to think that he could descend into the dip and stalk across the level saddle without the ram's sighting him.

If he waited, the ram would sooner or later leave this peak. Since he apparently thought himself safe now he would go only to the nearest grazing ground, and that meant any of the grass patches growing on the sides of the crag. However, he might go down either this or the other side of the peak.

If the ram came down this side, Barlow decided, he would elevate his gun sights and try a shot. An ordinary ram could be left until another day, stalked until he was within good shooting distance. But this was no ordinary ram. Once in a lifetime a man got a chance at a head like that. And Barlow was sure that if he let the ram go now he would never see him again.

However, if the ram went down the other side of the mountain to graze, Barlow knew that he could get within easy shooting distance. The ram would go only a few hundred feet, to the first good grazing. Knowing that there were no enemies on the peak he had just left, he would be watching the country below him. Barlow could run into the dip, cross the level saddle, climb the other peak, and kill the ram from its top.

Barlow crossed the thumb and forefinger of both hands and shook them. It was a meaningless little gesture, a good-luck sign he always made just before setting out on any hunt. The rifle, lying beside him, slid a little. Barlow's right hand darted to catch it, and a frown wrinkled his brow. His good-luck sign was broken. Then he laughed. There wasn't any meaning in it anyway. It was just a hunter's superstition. He peered through the spruce to make sure that the ram was still there.

AN hour passed. Still lying behind the stunted spruces, moving only enough to relieve his cramped muscles, Barlow watched the ram steadily. A great wave of joy swept through him when the ram walked to the top of the crag, stood in statuesque silhouette a moment, and disappeared over the farther rim. He had gone down to feed, and he had gone down the right side!

Rising, the hunter ran down into the dip and across the level saddle. Swift and sure, from years of experience at this, he made no noise whatever. When he started ascending the peak, he dropped his pace to a walk. Halfway up, being sure that the buttons on his shirt did not scrape the rocks and that his rifle touched nothing that would make a noise, he dropped to his belly and crawled.

Cautiously, moving forward an inch at a time, he crawled over the top of the peak to peer down the other side. He paused silently, and

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for a moment his breath caught in his throat.

Stretching before him, their rocky heads caressed by a bluer and more stainless sky than Barlow had ever seen before, was an endless succession of peaks. Girdled by green forests, they marched on until it seemed that the whole world could consist of nothing but such mountains. As Barlow stared, his very soul reached out to gather the rugged savagery, the unparalleled wildness of the scene. It seemed almost sacrilege for a man even to think of coming here.

Below him, not two hundred feet away, the great ram grazed. But now it was not only a ram. It was the living essence of the spirit and freedom that those distant peaks expressed. Barlow stared at the animal and shivered a little. The ram was home here; this was where he belonged. Surely those towering crags would never let him be hurt or taken from them!

Then the naturalist and hunter in Barlow triumphed over the sentimentalist and poet. He had come to kill the ram, to take the most magnificent head he had ever seen. He raised his rifle.

Just then the ram brought his head up and shuffled toward another patch of grass, twenty feet away. Barlow followed him with the gun. He was nervous, and he had no intention of shooting until the ram stopped again. There must be no miss, no wild shot. Barlow saw a rabbit jump from the grass and go bounding away. Directly in front of another great boulder, the ram stopped to watch the rabbit. Barlow's finger tightened on the trigger, almost achieved the pressure necessary for shooting.

Then suddenly the hawk dropped from the sky onto the rabbit. At this sudden, unexpected interruption, the ram leaped skittishly a dozen feet from the boulder. Barlow saw his bullet smash into the rock, at exactly the place where the ram had stood a second before.

When the gun crashed, the ram turned. All in a split second his eyes sought and found the hunter, and he was away. Barlow followed him with five more shots as he leaped boulders and flew across the unobstructed level ground. But his hand was shaking now. He saw little geysers of dirt erupt where the bullets struck. Unharmed, the ram sped on.

When the ram was safely out of sight, Barlow arose. He looked long and hard at the mountain peaks, and he thought somehow that they would not have looked so unspoiled and magnificent if he had killed the ram. His eyes strayed upward, to where the hawk was carrying the rabbit away. And then the hunter knew that this was the way it was meant to be from the first. The ram belonged in the peaks, not in a museum. The great chagrin that had invaded Barlow when he had missed the ram began to ebb out of his mind and body.

He made a respectful salute in the direction the departing ram had taken and turned to go back down the mountain.

THE END

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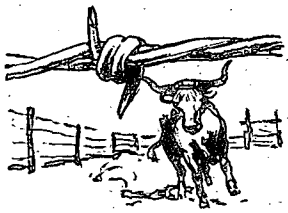
RANGE SAVVY

by Carl Raht

In the '70s, when barbed wire was first introduced, cattlemen would have nothing to do with it. They argued that barbed wire could not hold cattle, and would serve only to get stock cut on the sharp barbs. To prove the cattlemen were wrong, the manufacturer built a barbed-wire corral in the heart of the Texas range and invited ranchmen to pen their wildest cattle in the corral. They did, the thin strands held, and cattlemen began buying barbed wire.



The wagon sheet, or canvas covering used on freight outfits in the early days of the West, served for purposes other than just covering the wagons during stormy weather. In parts of the country where the soil was sticky gumbo, the roads became almost impassable in rainy weather and often the freight wagons, and even the teams themselves, would stick in the mud. But the freighters learned that by spreading the coarse-woven wagon sheet over the soft spot, the teams would pull the heavily loaded wagons safely over it. Sometimes, after this was accomplished, it would then require a team of horses to pull the wagon sheet out of the mud.

Mexican wood choppers in the Southwest will tell you that *palo fierro,* the ironwood tree, is well named because of its toughness. It is a native of the desert and is much used for ornaments. Ironwood, which is as dark as mahogany, takes a high polish. Heavier even than mahogany, it will not float in water, yet it is classed as a member of the pea family. It proves its relationship by putting out small lavender flowers which develop into little pods of peas. The Indians ate the peas, and from the ironwood fashioned war clubs. If more peaceably inclined, they fashioned the ironwood into spades and planting sticks.

In the early days, cattlemen were greatly mystified the first time they saw an Indian walking down the street of a little cow town, with his hair plastered in mud, giving his head the appearance of a giant dirt dauber's nest. It was soon learned that this mud coiffure was used to rid the wearer of head lice. After a reasonable time the Indian ducked his head in a nearby horse trough and went on his way thoroughly deloused.

Mr. Raht will pay one dollar to anyone who sends him a usable item for RANGE SAVVY. Please send these items in care of Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Be sure to inclose a three-cent stamp for subjects which are not available.

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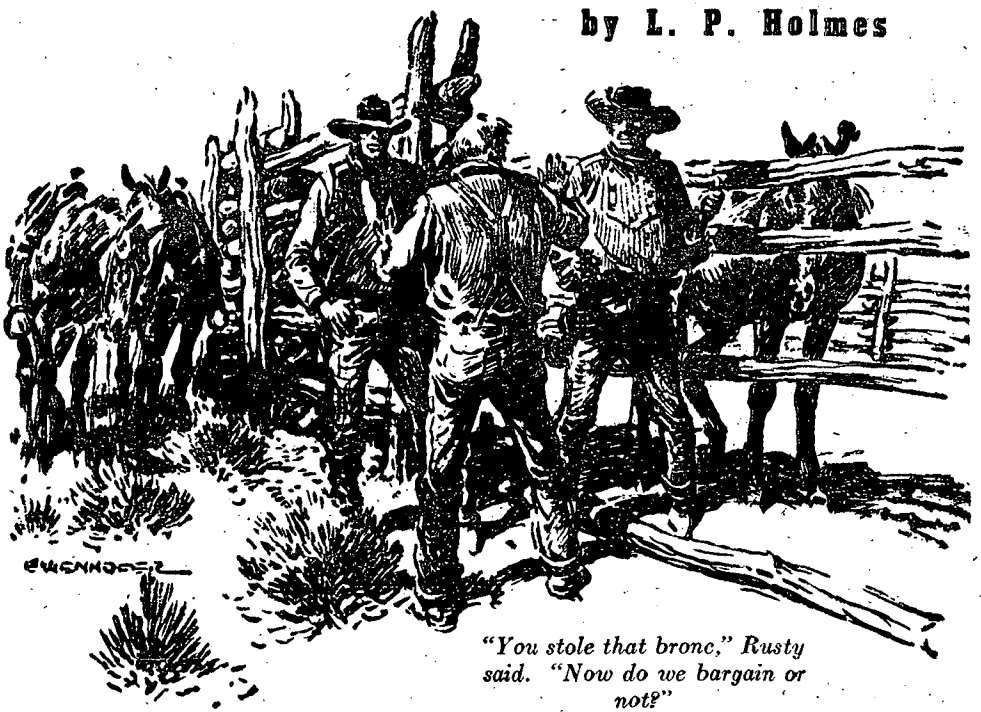
GUNPOWDER VERDICT

by L. P. Holmes



"You stole that bronc," Rusty said. "Now do we bargain or not?"

When Rusty Ryan hit Bell City the first thing he did was drop into a handy saloon to wash the dust from his throat with a beer. Then, a cigarette drifting pale-blue smoke past the angle of his bold, sun-blackened jaw, he prowled slowly up one side of the single street and down the other. And each time Rusty came to a sorrel bronc tied at a hitch rail, he looked the animal over carefully. There were a lot of cow ponies on the street this day and quite a few of them were sorrels, so Rusty made comparatively slow progress.

With both sides of the street carefully canvassed, Rusty paused, pushed his battered old Stetson over one eye and scratched his coppery head reflectively.

"No soap," he murmured. "But then, I reckon I was expecting too much. That Colorado bronc wouldn't hardly be tied right out in plain sight on an open street. I'll just have to play my cards a little slower and see what drops."

He drifted back to the three-sided square, or plaza, which opened off the west side of the street, about halfway down. There, with a couple of lazy cottonwoods to soften the square, barnlike ugliness of the building, stood the Redstone County courthouse. Things were doing in that courthouse apparently, for there were a number of buckboards tied about and quite a few people in evidence.

Here, also, squatting on his heels, his back against a hitch-rail post, a

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disconsolate cigarette drooping from one corner of his lips, was a glum-looking cowboy, staring at the ground and scratching aimless patterns in the dust with one brown forefinger. Rusty stopped beside him, with a friendly grin.

"Must be big business going on in that courthouse yonder," he remarked.

The cowboy looked up, first with hard-eyed truculence, then with mellowing tolerance.

"Stranger?" he grunted.

Rusty nodded. "Just got in, maybe half an hour ago."

"That's why you wouldn't know about it," growled the cowboy bitterly. "Yeah, I reckon you might call it big business. But a damned crooked, rotten business! They got Jim Haskell on trial for his life, and they're going to cinch him. I had to get out of their blasted courtroom, else I'd have shot me a flock of those lying witnesses they're ringing in on Jim. Justice! Fair trial! Twelve good men and true! Hogwash!" And the cowboy spat in supreme disgust.

Rusty hunkered down beside the cowboy, building another cigarette. "Friend of yores, this Jim Haskell feller?"

"You bet! Squarest, whitest guy that ever drew breath. Oh, he gunned Thode Burley, all right. But Burley asked for it. And Jim let him have first bite. Burley even creased Jim's left arm before Jim made a pass for his gun. Clearest kind of case of self-defense. But I reckon that's a forgotten plea, these days. You ought to hear that sanctimonious old goat of a Rye Dillon spout about the necessity of putting a stop to what he calls indiscriminate gunplay. And in his day Rye Dillon has smoked enough men down to carpet a square acre of hell."

"I reckon no fair-minded man wants to see gunplay," Rusty drawled. "Yet there's times when nothing else will do."

"Right!" agreed the cowboy emphatically. "Like this time. And it ain't only that I feel bad about Jim Haskell. There's Lois Chardon. She just sits in there, watching Jim, her eyes big and soft and helpless-looking, and her li'le chin doing its darnedest to keep from shaking. And every time one of them lying witnesses drives another nail in Jim's coffin, she kind of shivers and the big tears roll down her cheeks."

The cowboy surged to his feet under the whip of his thoughts. "I got to get out of town," he blurted savagely. "If I don't, I'm going to massacre me a flock of those lying coyotes."

Rusty stood up, his blue eyes glinting in understanding. "Me," he drawled, "I don't shake hands too easy, but this is one time I'm wanting to. I'm Rusty Ryan, and I like yore kind, friend."

The cowboy struck hands. "Glad to know you, Ryan. I'm Curly Kelsey. My feathers don't always ruffle so easy. But a deal like this shore does get under my skin."

THERE was a burst of activity about the door of the courthouse and a crowd came surging out. Somebody called to a friend who had waited outside: "The arguing and talk are all done. The jury is out. We ought to know pretty quick just what Haskell's finish will be."

"Me," bawled another, "I'm willing to bet a hundred they cinch him."

Curly Kelsey growled in his throat. "Of course they'll cinch him. With Rye Dillon cracking the whip over those spineless jiggers. Here comes Lois Chardon, Ryan."

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From the crowd appeared a slim girl, dressed in divided skirt of corduroy and a plain woolen blouse. She walked quickly, her fair head bowed.

"I guess," murmured Rusty, "that yonder girl and this Jim Haskell are kind of that way about each other?"

"Since they were kids," Curly nodded. "Living on adjoining ranches you might say they grew up together. And been sweethearts from the first."

Rusty blinked, his blue eyes shining. "Now you wouldn't think, just looking at me, that I was a sentimental sort of hairpin. But I am, Curly—I am. I'm a stranger here, and all I know about this ruckus is what you've told me. But right now I'm shore on the side of Lois Chardon and Jim Haskell. Should they cinch that boy, we'll have to do something about it."

"There ain't a cussed thing we can do, Rusty, not a single thing," said Curly hopelessly. "That's the devil of it."

The girl was coming right by them. She threw them a quick glance, her eyes big and strained in her white face. Curly took off his hat and Rusty followed suit.

"What are Jim's chances, Miss Lois?" Curly asked gently.

She hesitated, turned and came over to them. "I'm afraid," she said, her voice little more than a choked whisper, "none at all, Curly. That jury, and those lying witnesses, particularly Swain and Dutra—"

Rusty, watching her closely, saw her lips and chin tremble, saw her resolutely fight back the emotion which threatened to overwhelm her. He jabbed a reminding elbow in Curly's ribs. The puncher caught on.

"Miss Lois, meet Rusty Ryan. He feels like I do about this thing."

The girl nodded mechanically, scarcely seeing Rusty at all. But it gave him his opportunity.

"You keep your chin up, ma'am," he said. "Right now you've given up hope. But don't you. I've knocked around this old world some and I never saw a tangle yet that couldn't be straightened out with a little patience and hard hitting in the right place."

Now she did look at him, wondering. "I'd like to believe you're right, Mr. Ryan. But . . . but it seems there's no way to turn, any more. Just the same—thank you."

"Maybe I better ride out home with you," Curly suggested.

Lois shook her head. "I'll be all right, Curly."

She went on. Curly turned to Rusty. "Now," he growled, "you know why I feel like putting on a shoot-out which these sniveling yaps will date time from."

Rusty's eyes were gleaming. "Maybe we will, Curly, before we're done. Maybe we will. You'd be surprised how many ways there are of skinning a cat."

THREE men came out of the courthouse, paused for a moment to talk to some others in the shade of one of the cottonwoods, then came on toward the street. One was grizzled, with a beaked, bony face and a thin, tight mouth. The other two were riders, laughing and swaggering. They were a hard-looking pair, one heavy-set, with hair and eyebrows bleached almost to a cottony whiteness; the other was lank and swarthy.

Curly Kelsey was gritting his teeth, his eyes blazing. And as the three drew opposite he spoke harshly: "Skunks—three of them. All out of the same den, all smelling to high heaven!"

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The three stopped and turned. "Better soft-pedal that kind of talk, Kelsey," the grizzled one said. "You're leading with yore neck."

"I soft-pedal nothing where you're concerned, Rye Dillon," Curly rasped. "You may have a lot of these jaspers fooled, but I see you exactly as you are, crooked, slimy—ah, hell!" Curly spat in the dust.

Rusty saw a sort of crimson light burn far back in this Rye Dillon's eyes as he said to his companions:

"A lesson in manners will do that hombre good. Show him!"

Curly laughed recklessly. "Swell! Guns or fists, Dutra—and you, Swain. Come and get it!"

Curly was on the lanky side, but he had a good pair of shoulders. He flexed them, now.

"I'm in on this with you, cowboy," Rusty murmured.

Dutra, the towhead, and Swain, the swarthy one, moved in on Curly, spreading a trifle to get him between them. Rusty glided forward, caught the burly Dutra by the shoulder and swung him around.

"Look!" grinned Rusty. Then he knocked Dutra flat with a knotty right fist that blurred and exploded.

This unlooked-for angle upset Blackie Swain badly. In starting for Curly Kelsey, Swain had been counting heavily on Bull Dutra's well-known rough-and-tumble ability. And with that so abruptly removed, Swain hesitated.

He hesitated too long. For Curly had started one from away back, and he nailed Swain with it, square between the eyes. The puncher went reeling backward to bump heavily into Rye Dillon, before spinning around and falling flat on his face.

"Whoopee!" yelled Curly. "Two up and two down. Set 'em up in the other alley!"

Dillon, staggered from the impact with Swain, recovered himself, crouched slightly and sent a talon hand creeping under his coat toward his left armpit. His mouth was twisted into a venomous line.

"Don't try it, Dillon!" Rusty Ryan warned crisply. "You'd never get there. Besides, I understand you're one who gets the screaming horrors at the mere thought of indiscriminate gunplay. And the shooting will shore get indiscriminate if you keep on trying to sneak out that shoulder gun you pack. Cut it fine—cut it fine! That's better. Curly, lift the guns off those other two washouts. Only men have the right to pack guns, and them two don't rate."

The excitement had brought a crowd. One in that crowd, a reed-thin man with a sad, horsy-looking face, wore a star.

"I knew it," he complained. "I knew this cussed trial would bring on more trouble. Now—what started this ruckus?"

"Kelsey's tongue," declared Dillon waspishly. "He started calling names."

Somebody in the crowd laughed. "Maybe Curly started it with his tongue, but him and that sorrel-top jigger shore finished it with their fists. Holy mackerel! Did you ever see two hombres out colder than Bull and Blackie?"

"They shore seem to be listening to the birdies," conceded the sheriff, with what Rusty could have sworn was a glimmer of a twinkle in his eyes. "They'll probably live to be hit harder, though I doubt it. Scatter, everybody! Curly, you and yore red-headed friend get along and cool off. And don't start punching too many people sort of casual thisaway. Else I'll let you thinks it over in the jug. Beat it!"

Curly grinned happily. "All

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right, Beansy. Just as you say. Come on, Rusty."

THE jury was out an hour and fifteen minutes. They brought in a verdict of guilty—second degree. Rusty and Curly Kelsey were in the Homestead when the word came.

"Second degree, eh," observed the bartender. "Well, that means Jim Haskell will go over the road for a long, long time. Too bad!"

"You might as well hang a man as put him behind the bars for, say, ten years," commented a man at the bar. "Especially a man like Jim Haskell. The old saying holds: 'Cage an eagle and it'll die.' I guess Rye Dillon is satisfied, now."

"And I'll bet Beansy King is relieved," another man remarked. "If the jury had returned first degree, with no recommendations, then Judge Finnell would have had to sentence Haskell to hang. Which would have meant an awful dirty job for Beansy, seeing as how him and Haskell were always good friends. Tough job, hanging a friend. Ugh!"

Curly Kelsey headed for the door. "I got to get out of here," he growled. "Those morbid fools!"

Out in the street cool, blue twilight shadows were forming. Rusty spoke slowly. "Everybody seems agreed that this Rye Dillon hombre is mainly responsible for the tight Haskell is in. Was this Thode Burley a special friend of Dillon's?"

"He rode for Dillon," Curly said. "But I don't figure it was just grief over Burley that set Dillon after Jim Haskell so hard. I see it as a chance for Dillon to work his everlasting greed."

"Yeah? How's that?"

"Jim has plenty good water on his Cornstalk range, and there ain't nothing Rye Dillon loves more than good water and range except twice as much. By getting Haskell behind the bars for a long stretch, Dillon would have a swell chance of ending up owning that water and range."

"Dutra and Swain—they ride for Dillon, too, of course?"

"That's right."

"And it was their testimony that was mainly responsible for cinching Haskell?"

"Yeah, the lying coyotes!"

"Strikes me as a pretty bald set-up," Rusty said slowly. "I can't figure people being fooled that easy."

"They ain't," grunted Curly. "Not many of them, anyway. The trouble is, Rusty, too many people in these parts owe Dillon money. I'll bet half that jury owes Dillon, on mortgages and one thing another. That's why they're afraid to stand up and defy him. He's got 'em where he wants 'em. It's a tight hand, all right—one you can't break through."

"Oh, I don't know," Rusty drawled. "In my time I've seen more than one of these cast-iron tie-ups go smash, once you put a twist on 'em from the right angle. In my game I've learned you've got to fight the devil with his own tools if you crave real results."

Curly looked at him keenly. "Just what is yore game anyhow, Rusty?"

The redhead laughed softly. "Kind of let something slip, didn't I? Well, that's what a big mouth will do to a man. I'll tell you, Curly. I sort of do chores for the High Plains Cattleman's Protective Association."

"Oh!" exclaimed Curly. "One of them kind of guys, eh?"

"Yup! One of them kind of guys. Now tell me straight. You're absolutely convinced that Jim Haskell has a clear case of self-defense?"

"I shore am. I'm basing my judgment on knowing Jim, himself, and

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on the story he told in court. And Jim wouldn't lie, if it meant his own neck."

"Were Dutra and Swain the only witnesses called against Haskell?"

"They were the only ones who actually saw the shoot-out. There were a couple of others who swore they heard Jim tell Thode Burley he'd dry his scalp for him if he didn't watch his step."

"You think Haskell made such a threat?"

Curly nodded. "I heard Jim tell Burley off, myself."

"What was the poison between this Thode Burley and Jim Haskell?"

Curly hesitated. "I feel like a blathering gossip," he admitted. "But it was over Lois Chardon. Burley made himself pretty ornery to Lois once or twice. And Lois had no more use for him than she did a rattlesnake."

"You know," remarked Rusty, "I like this boy Jim Haskell better all the time. We shore got to do something for him. Well, suppose we go corral a little grub. I think better when I'm full fed."

IT was another day. In front of the Homestead, lounging at ease in a couple of round-back chairs and absorbing the early-morning sunshine like a pair of lazy sand lizards, Rusty Ryan and Curly Kelsey watched the world go by. A tall, finely erect man, with snow-white hair and a white imperial, walked down the other side of the street.

"That's Judge Finnell," said Curly. "Why is it that judges, who sentence men to the rope or the bars, are always such kindly-looking old cusses?"

"Hum!" Rusty murmured drowsily. "Come to think of it, they generally are, ain't they? Well, it ain't their fault. They got oaths of office to uphold, just like me. Now, suppose I was to find out that you were the one who stole Tom McCloud's pet bronc. I'd hate like sin to do it, but I reckon I'd take you back to the High Plains with me, where they'd lengthen yore neck a foot or so with a rope."

Curly grinned. "You can think of the darnedest things! Only, you ain't kindly-looking. You're a rough, tough redhead, with ticks in yore hair."

Red chuckled. One thing he liked about life. Here and there as a man went along, he met up with regular gents. Like this Curly Kelsey.

But now Curly was curious. "So that's what brought you leaking down into this country, eh? Look-

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ing for a stole bronc?"

"Yup. A sorrel with white points. A real bronc, a Colorado horse. Tom McCloud, up on the High Plains, bought it off a Ute on the reservation. The horse packs an Indian brand on the off shoulder, a brand that looks more like a spread-out bearskin than anything else. Tom McCloud thought a heap of that bronc and I don't blame him. It was—sa-ay, what you looking so funny about?"

"Nothing," said Curly very slowly, "only Pinch Frazee wanted to sell me that bronc not ten days ago. I'd have bought it, too—had I the money. But a hundred pesos was too rich for my blood."

Rusty was sitting straight up, now. "This Pinch Frazee—who is he?" he asked crisply.

"A raggety-tag bronc trader out on Loco Mono Creek. Got a starved-looking wife and a passel of kids. And thinking of that woman and the kids, if you go try to arrest Pinch, I'll bust yore jaw. Should he get hung, his wife and kids would starve, complete."

"Where'd he get the bronc? Did he say?"

"I didn't ask him," said Curly. "All I know is he had the pony and and was trying to sell it. Blackie Swain come nearest to buying. He told Frazee if he was ready to take seventy-five for the animal, to come around and make the deal."

A gleam came into Rusty's blue eyes. "Oh, he did, did he? Curly, my brain is moving so fast she's heating up. I think I got something. By gosh—I know I have! Listen, you sift down to the corral and cinch a kak on your bronc and one on mine. I'll meet you there in ten-fifteen minutes. Then you and me are taking a ride out and see this Pinch Frazee jigger."

"And while I cinch kaks on broncs, what are you going to do?" demanded Curly suspiciously. "Remember I said—"

"Yeah, I know," soothed Rusty. "What I am going to do is have a little talk with Beansy King, your estimable sheriff. What I ain't going to do is let that Frazee woman and her kids starve to death. Now rustle along, like a good feller."

Sheriff Beansy King was in his office, alone. Rusty shut the door behind him and locked it. And then for ten minutes he talked, while the lawman listened, first half angrily, then with interest, and finally with enthusiasm.

"It's a go," declared Beansy, when Rusty finished. "I don't know about the ethical side of this scheme of yores, Ryan. Mebbe we'll be kicking chunks big as a bull buffalo out of the law. But something about the idea sort of hits me right. Fly to it. I'll back yore play."

ABOUT an hour later Rusty Ryan and Curly Kelsey forded Loco Mono Creek, a pleasant, alder-shaded little stream. Rusty grinned.

"Loco Mono. In Spanish that's Crazy Monkey. Kind o' fits, Curly. That's me, right now. A crazy monkey. No sane person could possibly hatch the scheme I'm on."

Across the stream was a meadow, with a ramshackle cabin, a barn and a rickety corral. In the corral was a sorrel bronc with white points and an Indian brand like a spread bearskin on the off shoulder.

"That's the bronc," murmured Rusty.

A hatchet-faced, untidy-looking man, with a weak mouth and faded eyes, came slouching from the cabin. Behind him in the doorway appeared a tired, hopeless-looking woman. Several youngsters clung to her

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calico dress and stared solemnly at Rusty and Curly.

"Hello, Frazee," said Curly. "Friend of mine here is interested in that bronc you tried to sell me. Price just the same?"

"Yeah," mumbled Frazee, his eyes shifty. "Hundred dollars cash takes it."

"Mind if I look the horse over close?" asked Rusty carelessly. He grinned. "I'd hate to pony up a hundred simoleons and find the animal had a weak spot."

"Sound," said Frazee. "Sound as a nut." He led the way to the corral, then turned. "Cheap at the price, that bronc. You—"

"No, you!" said Rusty softly. He had a gun out and the muzzle was looking Frazee right in the eye. "You keep right on walking. Say, down to the creek, where it's cool. I got something to say to you, mister, and I don't want to worry yore wife. Hike!"

Pinch Frazee went white as a sheet and his weak chin wabbled. He stumbled along to the creek. And there, out of sight and hearing, Rusty dismounted, ran a hand over Frazee for weapons, found none and motioned to a boulder.

"Sit down!" he ordered. "I'm talking cold turkey to you, mister. You stole that bronc, up in the High Plains country."

Pinch Frazee gulped and swallowed and gulped again. He wanted to lie and was afraid to. So, weak with fear, he told the truth. "Yeah," he admitted hoarsely. "I stole the bronc. Horse-trading business has been bad lately. The . . . the wife and kids were hungry, and nobody around here would give me a riding job. I was desperate. I went up to the High Plains, figgering I might find work there, but I couldn't. Then, on the way out, I saw that bronc. I knew I could sell that one. So I put a rope on it and brought

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WILD WEST WEEKLY

10c A COPY AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

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it along. That's the truth, so help me!"

Rusty had been watching his man closely. And now the hard gleam in the redhead's eyes softened slightly. "Yeah, I can see it is, Frazee. Which still leaves you a horse thief. Still, a man who'll take a chance on a noose to feed his wife and kids deserves some kind of a break. I aim to give you one. I understand that Blackie Swain said he'd take the bronc for seventy-five dollars. That right?"

"Yeah," mumbled Frazee. "That's right."

"Good! You take the bronc, hunt him up and make the sale. And keep yore mouth shut. Don't mention a word about me and Curly being out here to see you. And you take that seventy-five dollars right to your wife and put it in her hand and tell her it's all hers. She'll spend it the way it ought to be spent. Don't try no tricks, or I'll come back after you. And that will mean the noose, because I got Curly here as a witness to the fact that you admitted stealing the bronc. Savvy?"

Pinch Frazee savvied, all right. His look was that of a man who had felt the clutch of a rope around his neck and then found that he could get rid of it. "I . . . I'll do it, mister," he stuttered. "I'll do it just exactly the way you say."

"Good!" said Rusty. "And maybe a job will come along for you pretty quick."

IT was late afternoon of the same day. Rusty and Curly were holding down the same chairs in front of the Homestead and were in the shade, now. Hoofs clattered up street. Swinging lazy heads, Rusty and Curly saw Rye Dillon, Bull Dutra and Blackie Swain ride up to the Two Bar, dismount, tie and go in. The bronc Swain had ridden was a fine-looking sorrel with white points. Rusty stuck out a freckled, hairy fist, palm up.

"Pay me," he grinned.

Curly dropped a dollar in the redhead's palm. "You're either lucky as or smart as Satan, I dunno which," he growled. "Now what?"

"You go round up Beansy King and wait with him at his office for me. I got business at the Two Bar."

Curly hesitated. "Listen, you carrot-topped ape, just because you and me dusted off Dutra and Swain the other day, don't think they ain't tough. And Dillon, he can be a snake with a gun."

Rusty slapped him on the shoulder, blue eyes gleaming with battle light. "Don't worry, cowboy. I'm the best li'le snake stomper on you ever saw. Get along. Yore Uncle Rusty can take care of himself."

Curly clanked away and Rusty headed for the Two Bar. He didn't hesitate a bit. He went right in, walked over to where Dillon and the two punchers were leaning against the bar, and tapped Swain on the shoulder. Swain swung around, scowling, with Dillon and Dutra following suit.

"What do you want?" growled Swain. "Keep yore paws off me!"

"That bronc you just rode in on," drawled Rusty. "Where did you get it?"

"What's it to you?"

"This!" said Rusty, flashing his badge. "That bronc was stolen off Tom McCloud up in the High Plains country. Swain, you're under arrest for bronc stealing."

That set Swain back on his heels. He licked his lips. "You're crazy! I bought that bronc."

Rusty shrugged wearily. "The old story. It don't go. You're under arrest. I'm taking yore guns."

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"Don't let him have 'em, Blackie," snarled Dutra. "Rye and me are backing you."

This was all Rusty wanted. He flashed a gun and slammed Swain across the head with it. Swain crumpled. The bartender let go a sort of strained gasp and Rusty, understanding, leaped wide and quick. The gun Dutra had sneaked out blared thunderously, and a bullet missed Rusty's spinning figure by the merest fraction. Then Rusty flung two quick shots across his body.

Bull Dutra grunted, like a porker hit with a club. He weaved drunkenly and sat down, firing one more blind, wild, dying shot.

There was a queer, muffled snap and Rye Dillon cursed in shrill agony as he tottered and fell. That last blind shot of Dutra's had smashed the cattleman's hip.

The gunfire brought the inevitable rush. Men came crowding in from the street and in the forefront was Curly Kelsey and Sheriff Beansy King. Curly gave a sigh of relief as he saw Rusty standing there with smoking gun.

"Listen, Ryan," yelped Beansy King. "I didn't figure—"

"It's all right, Beansy," cut in Rusty grimly. "I set out to arrest Blackie Swain as a horse thief. I called for his guns and he wouldn't give 'em up. So I gun-whipped him. Then Dutra went smoky. He took the first cut at me. I beat him to the second. When he was down he shot one more, blind. He dropped Dillon. Right, barkeep?"

The bartender, pale and sweating, had both hands on the top of the bar, palms down. He gulped and stuttered. "Th-that's right. That's exactly right. D-Dutra went smoky. I thought . . . I thought—"

Beansy King examined Dutra, then turned to Rye Dillon, who was writhing, half unconscious with the pain of his shattered hip. The sheriff stood up, shrugging.

"Maybe Dillon would have been luckier if Dutra's slug had got him in the heart," he said grimly. "At his age, and with a shattered hip—well, somebody get Doc Walker."

BLACKIE SWAIN, bandaged head in his hands, sat hunched in a chair in Beansy King's office. King and Curly Kelsey stood apart, silently watching and listening, while Rusty Ryan stood over Swain.

"You're lying, Swain!" growled Rusty. "You know you're lying. Just like you lied in court about Jim Haskell. You're going back to the High Plains with me where they keep a noosed rope handy for horse thieves."

"But I tell you I didn't steal that bronc!" groaned Blackie Swain. "I didn't steal it. I bought it from Pinch Frazee. I paid him seventy-five dollars for that damned horse, just today."

"No go, Swain," Rusty said remorselessly. "The truth ain't in you. Had you told the truth about Jim Haskell's shoot-out with Thode Burley, I might be inclined to believe you, now. But any man who'd lie on a witness stand would shore lie about stealing a bronc. And you shore lied on the witness stand. You know you did. Yep, you're going to swing for stealing that bronc. You and me are leaving right away for the High Plains. O. K. with you Beansy?"

"O. K. with me," growled the sheriff. "Take him along, Rusty."

Rusty jangled a pair of handcuffs. Swain shrank down in his chair at the ominous sound. "All right," he moaned. "All right. I did lie about

Continued on page 91

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Continued from page 89—

Haskell. But I'm telling you the truth about that bronc. I swear I am!"

Rusty gave a sigh of relief. "All right, Curly," he said. "Go get Judge Finnell."

Curly, giving a muffled whoop of delight, hurried out. Rusty looked at Beansy King.

"You win, Rusty," said the sheriff. "This is great news."

Now that the dam had broken, Blackie was more than voluble. The puncher was not overly bright. In his mind, giving false evidence in a court of law was a little thing. But he knew the sentiment in a cow country regarding horse stealing. And it was that charge he was afraid of. So he readily admitted the one, while denying the other.

Judge Finnell listened in stern, harsh silence while Swain talked: "Dutra and me lied about the Burley killing. Rye Dillon paid us two hundred dollars apiece to do it. Thode Burley and Bull Dutra and me had been hitting the liquor pretty hard that day. On our way out to the home ranch we met up with Haskell, just outside of town. Burley blocked the trail and began cussing Haskell out. Haskell took it, telling Burley he was drunk and not responsible. Then Burley threw a gun and nipped Haskell's left arm. Not until then did Haskell make his draw and down Thode Burley. That's the truth, so help me."

Judge Finnell took a couple of turns, up and down the office. The first indignant anger faded from his fine face, leaving him looking old and weary. "At times like this, I find it hard to retain any confidence in human nature," he said.

Rusty smiled gravely. "Stick around, judge. You'll see something that will make you feel better. Jim Haskell goes loose, of course?"

"Immediately," nodded the judge. "Turn him loose, sheriff. I shall declare a mistrial. But this fellow Swain—"

"He's mine, judge," said Rusty. "Seeing as he came clean about Jim Haskell, I figure maybe he's telling the truth about that bronc. The bronc goes back to Tom McCloud, of course. Swain, you're out a bronc, seventy-five dollars and a job. You got a sore noggin besides. I reckon that's punishment enough for you. Beansy, I'd suggest you lock him up for the night and give him a floater out of this county in the morning. What do you think?"

"I think that's about as good as anything, Rusty," said Beansy. "All right, Swain. Come along."

CURLY KELSEY had slipped out again. Now he came back. With him was Lois Chardon, her eyes shining and eager, her soft, wistful lips trembling. She was watching the inner door, which opened on a hall that led to the jail out back. Beyond that door sounded the murmur of voices, then swift, confident steps. A clean-cut, tawny-haired young rider came in from the hall, with Beansy King, grinning behind him.

"Jim!" sobbed the girl. Then she was in the young rider's arms.

Rusty touched Judge Finnell on the arm. "What do you think of human nature now, judge? Pretty fine, eh?"

Then the young couple stood in front of Rusty. Lois Chardon's eyes were tear-wet and luminous, her soft cheeks blooming. She was sweetly shy, but determined.

"Curly told me something of what to expect and why," she stammered. "And . . . well—" Suddenly she

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was on tiptoe, framing Rusty's bold, hard jaw in her soft hands. And she kissed him. "There. Thank you, Rusty Ryan."

Then it was Jim Haskell, wringing Rusty's big, freckled paw. "Lois and me—we'll never forget," he said huskily.

Rusty slid a big arm about the shoulders of both of them, herded them to the door. "Git!" he ordered gruffly. "May your trail always be on the sunny side of the hill."

He watched them for a moment as they went along the dusk-darkening street, significantly hand in hand. Pulling out a faded bandanna, he blew his nose a resounding blast. Then he turned to face Curly and Judge Finnell and Beansy King truculently.

"It's my business if I want to be a sentimental galoot," he growled. "And did somebody say anything about a drink?"

"I'm saying it!" exclaimed Beansy King, opening a deep drawer in his desk, to unearth a full, sealed quart. "This shore calls for a drink. You've busted the law four ways from the ace, Rusty. But I'm drinking yore health, just the same."

"What do you mean, busted the law?" retorted Rusty, his blue eyes twinkling. "Jim Haskell goes free, I get Tom McCloud's pet bronc back, and that Mrs. Pinch Frazee gets seventy-five dollars to buy some food and clothes for that passel of kids of hers. As I see it, there's only one thing left to do. Pinch Frazee needs a job. Then he won't be tempted to steal no more broncs. Between you and Judge Finnell, Beansy, you ought to be able to arrange that, somehow."

"I'm sure that can be arranged," said Judge Finnell gravely. "Ryan, I want to shake your hand. You've proven today that justice does not lurk only in a court of law. Often it travels with men like you."

"I still say he's a heller," grinned Beansy King. "An' I still say he gave the law an awful kicking around. But I sure admire him for it."

Rusty tipped his hat over one eye and scratched his flaming thatch. He grinned ruefully. "Maybe I did give yore old law a scratching here and there, Beansy, but I got justice done. And that's what counts, eh, judge?"

"Right!" said Judge Finnell, lifting his glass. "It is justice that counts. Gentlemen—let's drink to it!"

THE END

A STRANGE SUN DIAL

A LITTLE square monument that marks the common corners of the States of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona tells the time of day to the one who stops to consider that in the morning the shadow will lie north or south of the line between Utah and Arizona. At noon it will coincide with the lines between Utah and Colorado, and in the afternoon it will lie north or south of the line between Colorado and New Mexico. The line between Arizona and New Mexico does not enter into the computation.

There is another far more ancient timepiece on the desert, the nearby Ship Rock in northwestern New Mexico, the shadow of which told the Navahos the time ages ago—and still does.

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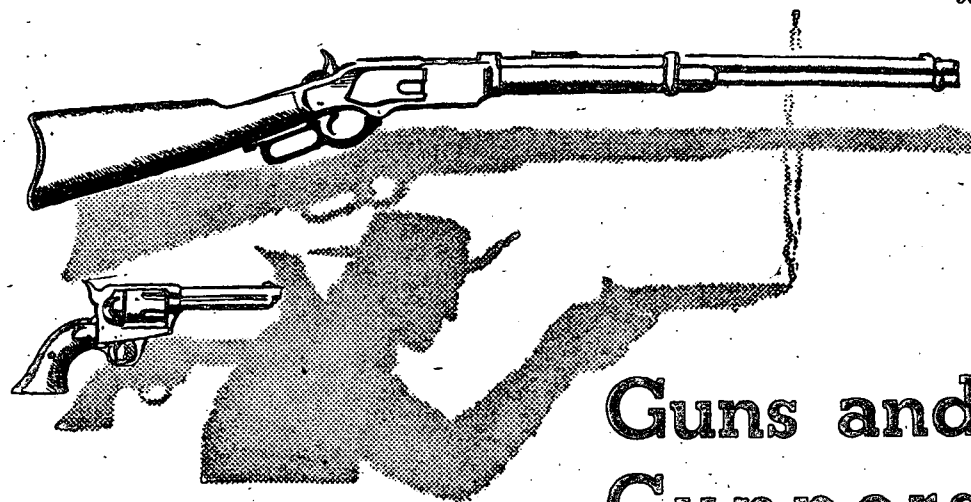

Guns and Gunners

By PHIL SHARPE

As we get into the new year the going for the firearms fan is becoming rough. Methods of picking a good used gun have already been discussed, but here are a few tips worth saving to guide you in picking your gun when you run into that "high-pressure" stuff from some chap who wants to unload a lot of junk on you.

First, in picking a good used .22 rifle. You can easily be stuck on one of these. A .22 is a cranky gun. If it is taken care of it will last indefinitely, but it will not stand neglect like the more expensive centerfire hunting rifles. Pick a good gun. Pick one of the better-known American brands such as a Winchester, Remington, Savage, Stevens, Marlin, Mossberg, et cetera. Do not get a gun without the original maker's address on it. That is important.

Consider very carefully any of these guns having a "maker's" name —but *no address*. Many of these are either cheap Belgian, Spanish and German imports into this country in the middle 1920s. They were brought in here and sold, after duties were paid, for under ten dollars, usually. There are a lot of cheap American guns available—guns by nonexistent makers, guns of unusually poor quality. Any cash you invest in such a specimen is a total waste. Why do it?

The bore of a .22 rifle should be as nearly perfect as possible. This is important. While a hunting rifle will "still shoot" with a rough bore, the .22 rimfire is sensitive, and rust and pits quickly destroy all traces of accuracy.

What accuracy can you expect with a good .22 rifle? I am not considering an expensive target rifle when I state that in the hands of an expert shot any good .22 selling originally at from ten dollars to twenty dollars should put ten successive shots into a hole which a dime will *cover* at fifty feet. But it probably will not do this with a rough, rusted bore.

Why the American makes suggested above? The answer is important. Look at a bit of history. Remington has been making rifles for more than one hundred and twenty-five years. I do not think that any firm *in the world* has such

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a long record of existence as a maker of firearms.

Winchester began in 1866. Marlin? That firm has been making rifles since 1870. And Savage? They started making rifles in 1899. Stevens? Ever since 1864. Mossberg? The baby of the field. Organized in 1919, they have forged into the .22 rifle field with more "firsts" than any other arms maker. They belong.

Suppose you want a shotgun. Manufacturing records clearly show that the two most popular items in the sporting firearms field are the .22 rifle and the shotgun. So it is to be assumed that thousands of lads will buy or trade shotguns this year. What to get?

First of all, let's consider the gauge. On the American market today the available gauges are the 12, 16, 20, 28 and .410. A few 10-gauge Magnum guns are sold—but while the year 1941 was tough on sporting arms, I'd like to gamble on it that I could pack all of the 10-gauge guns made in this country in my car and haul it in one load. Forget the 10-gauge.

The 28-gauge? A freak. Smaller than the 20-gauge, this belongs to the skeet shooter who likes to get into that particular size. It will be a difficult shell to get. Don't buy it.

The .410? This is one of America's mistakes. The gun was originally designed for the taxidermist who wanted small birds for mounting and did not want to tear them up. As a hunting gun, it is not worth considering. The tiny shell costs so little less than a real shotgun cartridge that it should not be given a second thought.

How to pick a shotgun? Rather simple—yet difficult. The principal factor is *make*. All rifle makers listed above make shotguns. Other good makes are Parker, Fox, Browning, Ithaca, Lefever, Western Arms and Crescent-Davis.

In the shotgun field there have been more "freak" makes than in any other field of firearms. Thousands of firms have had doubtful-quality guns made for them under thousands of special brand names. These guns were probably safe when they first came out—but not today with improved powders.

Do not buy any shotgun with Damascus, twist or laminated steel barrels. There is a "figure" or design in the metal of these barrels to help you recognize them. No ammunition maker loads shells today that are safe in these guns. Read the warning label on all boxes of ammunition.

Rough shotgun barrels are particularly poison. Fine-shot pellets in passing through rough barrels get flattened and "sandpapered" by the rough bore. Try to throw accurately a flat or ragged stone. Then try a good, round one. Pellets act the same way. Tests have shown that in a rough barrel as many as half of the pellets are destroyed and are thrown off to the side. Some, unfortunately, plow through the charge of good pellets, scattering and wasting many good pellets. See that your barrel is smooth and clean. See that the action is tight.

● This department has been designed to be of practical service to those who are interested in guns. Mr. Sharpe will gladly answer any question you may have concerning firearms. Just address your inquiries to Phil Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Department, Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. *Be sure you print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.*

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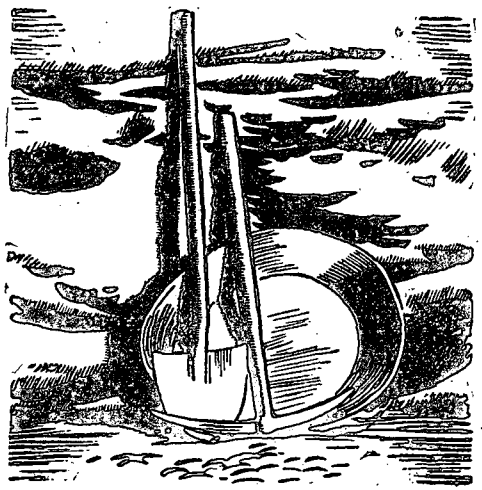

Mines and Mining

By J. A. THOMPSON

MENTION helium and the average person thinks of a rare, valuable gas, noninflammable, nonexplosive and lighter than air, used to provide the lifting power in dirigibles. The fact that it is government controlled and government produced mainly from the U. S. Bureau of Mines helium plant at Amarillo, Texas, is also pretty well known.

There is a lot more interesting and important data connected with this strange gas that is roughly only one seventh as heavy as air. It is not, as many suppose, lighter than hydrogen. The latter is the lightest known substance in the world. Preference for helium in dirigibles is due to its safety factor. Hydrogen is both inflammable and, when mixed with air, highly explosive. All air contains a certain amount of helium. About one part in 185,000. Helium, for use, is not extracted from the air. It comes from natural gas wells that have a comparatively high helium content. Roughly one to two parts of helium per hundred parts of gas is the average concentration found in the Cliffside wells in the Texas Panhandle near Amarillo.

From time to time readers have written in, as A. R. did from Louisville, Kentucky, this week, asking for information on helium. "Where is it produced? Where does it come from? And is it used for anything besides balloons and airships?" he asked.

Large-scale helium production was really born of necessity during the last World War, A. R. Previous to the introduction of this inert, light gas in military and naval aëronautics the use of lighter-than-air craft in connection with strategic operations, observation balloons and so forth was exceedingly hazardous because of the extreme inflammability of the hydrogen gas with which such craft were previously inflated. Enemy incendiary bullets puncturing the gas bags ignited the hydrogen and brought the craft crashing to earth in masses of flame.

Helium as a gas filler for lighter-than-air craft changed that. But before U. S. supplies of the gas could be opened up and production plants were really ready to turn out the gas on a large scale, the armistice was signed. Nevertheless, experiments had clearly demonstrated the tremendous military importance of helium, and following the War, its production became government controlled and virtually a world monopoly in the United States. More than ninety percent of all the helium that has been produced in the world so far has been produced under United States government operation.

Aside from its straight military uses, helium is used by the navy in diving operations, by the U. S.

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Weather Bureau for inflating meteorological balloons used in obtaining weather data, and for special purposes by such widely scattered government bureaus as the Department of Agriculture, the Public Health Service, the National Bureau of Standards and the Bureau of Mines.

Nongovernment uses include, in the medical line, relieving those who suffer from respiratory diseases such as asthma, and reducing hazards in the use of inflammable anæsthetics. Helium is also used to contribute to the safety and comfort of divers and caisson workers.

Though the demand for helium has been increasing rapidly, and will probably continue to do so, the Bureau of Mines helium plant at Amarillo with its twenty four million cubic feet of gas per year production capacity and its Cliffside field wells as a source of raw-gas material is expected to be able to handle all likely needs both military and civilian for some time to come. If not, addition of another production unit and the drilling of more wells in the vicinity can raise the capacity to thirty-six million cubic feet annually.

In spite of the fact that helium is noninflammable, the finding of a natural gas that won't burn issuing from shallow wells, swamp holes, openings in the ground, surface fissures and so forth *does not* mean a discovery of helium gas, as some of those who have written us seem to think. Helium has *never yet* been found in sufficient purity in naturally evolved gases that it would extinguish flame. Moreover, the content of helium in even the richest helium-bearing natural gases is so small that it would have little if any effect on the inflammability of the main body of the gas.

The reason certain natural gases will not burn has nothing to do with helium. It is the presence, as a rule, of large amounts of more common constituents such as nitrogen or carbon dioxide that prevents combustion.

As further demonstration of this, the natural gas of the Petrolia field, in Clay County, Texas, which was used at one time for the production of helium by the government, had very satisfactory commercial burning qualities. Even the gas now processed near Amarillo and used to supply the present government helium plant has excellent heating value. After passing through the helium-removal process, it is burned as fuel gas both in the plant and in the city of Amarillo.

To H. L., Fort Worth, Texas, another helium inquirer: Natural gases containing helium are widely distributed over the United States, but so far only a few localities have been discovered in which both the richness of the helium content and the available volume of the basic gases themselves were large enough for economical, practical helium extraction.

● We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

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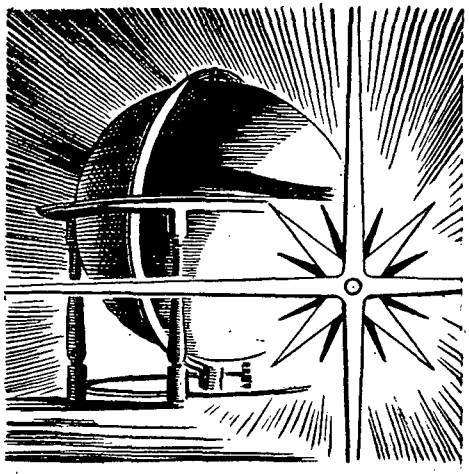

Where to go and how to get there

By JOHN NORTH

TRAPPING information, as sound as we can make it, has appeared in the columns of this department right along. This week we are glad to pass on some excellent firsthand trapping tips from a reader, A. D., a veteran trapper who sent in the following interesting letter from Grafton, Illinois: "In a past issue of Western Story I read an article about trapping for skunks, and if there is room for a reader to horn in, I would like to hand out a few additional tips myself. I have had a lot of experience trapping those striped kitties in Illinois.

"The best method I ever found for trapping skunks was first to locate their dens, as described in your article. When the first skunk is caught, skin it. Then use the carcass as a bait, tying it to a nearby sapling or pole close to the den. Set one or two No. 2 traps below the carcass that is used as a lure. The traps should be placed on dry, fine grass or leaves, set and covered lightly so they will not freeze. It is almost a certainty that next morning you will have made another catch.

"The odor of the musk seems to draw all skunks for at least a mile or more in the vicinity of the bait and those traps. I found in my own experience that a skunk carcass bait was also good for possums. Have caught as high as ten skunks and numerous possums at one of the above trap sets.

"As far as coon trapping is concerned, I have generally caught those inquisitive animals in clear, running streams, using as a rule No. 2 traps, setting the same, also lightly, in the stream or next to banks and fixing a weight to a chain thrown into deeper water away from the trap. Often I placed a shiny piece of tin —tobacco tin is good—on the trap plate to attract the creature's attention. Sometimes the coon was too smart to be caught on his first exploration and merely overturned the trap.

"My advice, when that happens, is not to turn the trap over if it is still unsprung. Leave her as she lays. The coon will be back. And the chances are he will outsmart himself the next time. Having turned the trap over once, he will try to repeat the trick on his next visit. Ten to one he will be caught in doing so the second time.

"Another good trapping trick that I have worked successfully requires a little judgment and some knowledge of winter weather forecasting. This is to track fur bearers to their dens after the first snow falls. Then immediately before another snow sets in, place your traps, securely an-

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chored to a stout root, or small tree, around the den entrance.

"Using the above methods, I managed to make quite a bit of pin money, everything considered, trapping in my spare time during the winter months."

Bet you did, too, A. D. And so do many others trapping as a whole or part-time outdoor occupation during the crisp, healthful winter months.

The trick of fastening a piece of bright tin to the trap pan when making a coon set is a good one quite frequently used, because coons have a lot of natural curiosity and will readily place their paw on any bright object under water. Leaving such a trap overturned when a coon has tipped it over without springing it is a new wrinkle as far as we are concerned. But we can see how it might, as A. D. says it does, bring the coon back a little bolder next time to paw at and investigate further the bright object that drew his attention.

Still it is, we believe, general experience that most coons trapped are taken with bait sets, the bait being hung over the water and leaning toward the trap. Hang the bait far enough away so that it can't be reached by Mr. Coon without his getting caught in the trap. Good coon baits are muskrat meat, bits of fish, chicken, squirrel, or rabbit, and frogs. If it is late in the season and no corn remains in any local fields, a shucked ear of corn hung over a trap set as bait may successfully draw coons.

Though smaller traps are sometimes used, and the choice of size is often a matter of personal preference among trappers, the No. 2 is, in our opinion, usually the best and safest for holding coons. Lighter traps, like the No. 1, for instance, are likely merely to grab a few toes rather than the coon's whole foot, and thus fail to obtain a secure grip on the animal.

To G. M., of Boise, Idaho: Hold that trigger finger! Cautious bird hunting is urged for the protection of the trumpeter swan, largest and rarest of the country's native wild fowl. These beautiful birds, almost extinct in 1930 and protected by the government, are not increasing as rapidly as was expected, according to a recent report of the U. S. Fish and Wild-life Service.

In addition to those lost through natural enemies and other causes, some of these birds have been killed by hunters in the past. Careful sportsmen can distinguish the huge, white-winged swan from the smaller snow goose with its black-tipped wings. This year, G. M., the latter is also protected in Idaho.

Poachers are liable to a stiff fine and jail sentence for killing any wild swan in the United States.

● We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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The Hollow Tree

By HELEN RIVERS

The thrilling annual rodeo that takes place in Madison Square Garden in New York City every year has long since come and gone, but the memory lingers on, and it's especially vivid to Jack Woodhouse, whose letter gets the Hollow Tree off to a start this week. Jack hails from Montana, but got stranded in the big city when the rodeo pulled out and he's finding it a little hard to get acquainted. How about snowing him under with plenty of mail so he won't feel so lonesome and, incidentally, get some firsthand information about horses and cowboys?

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would be very obliged if you would print this plea in your fine magazine. I am a lonesome cowboy stranded in the big city without many friends. I worked at the rodeo up here in Madison Square Garden and will gladly answer anyone's questions concerning it. I am seventeen years old and hail from Montana, and my favorite hobbies are Indian lore and horses. I will sincerely answer all letters, so please help me.—Jack Woodhouse, 408 East 89th Street, New York, New York

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Ed isn't easily discouraged—

Dear Miss Rivers:

This is my fourth desperate attempt to get my letter published in the Hollow Tree. I sure *hope you print my plea this time.* I've been reading Western Story for a long time now, and it's my favorite magazine. I would like to correspond with anyone who will write to a lonely young man. Age doesn't concern me at all—everybody's welcome. I like all sports, especially football and baseball, and my favorite team is the Chicago Cubs. Some of my favorite pastimes are reading, music, dancing, skating and the movies. I also like many other things, but the list would be too long to publish. Of course, my No. 1 hobby is writing and receiving letters, so please, somebody, give me a break and write to me. *I not only promise to answer all letters,* but guarantee it.—Ed Carlson, 11120 South Mariposa, Los Angeles, California

From down on the delta comes this plea—

Dear Miss Rivers:

We would like to have some Pen Pals and hope that you will print our letter in the next issue of your magazine. We have just read our first issue of Western Story and were so thrilled with it, especially the Pen Pal section, that we decided we would try our luck. We both have brown, curly hair and dark-brown eyes, and are five feet two inches tall. I am almost sixteen years old and Gloria will be seventeen soon. We both live in Mississippi and can tell you all about the delta, and we'll exchange letters and snapshots with all Pen Pals.—Mary Leona Jacobs, 203 Main Street, Leland, Mississippi, and Gloria Jarvis, 105 Garrison Street, Leland, Mississippi

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Nora will exchange hobby items—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Here is a plea for a hobby pal. I collect salt and pepper shakers, souvenirs, hankies and State pillow tops. I would exchange with any other hobby pal who wishes. I will answer all letters and cards, so come on, Pals, and don't disappoint me. I would especially like to hear from those living in Washington, Utah, Oregon, Florida, Alabama, Arizona and Mississippi.—Nora Christian, Pounding Mill, Virginia

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Bertie seeks adventure—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I want to hear from some of your Pals living outside the United States. I am single, thirty-two years old, and for pastime write letters and collect stamps and picture post cards from all parts of the world. I have also been having some travel adventures by collecting magazines and travel literature from foreign countries. But besides this, a person must do something to earn his daily bread, and I am at present operating a small country grocery store. I am also interested in photography, especially in taking pictures of wild animals. My love of adventure makes me want to hear from folks outside the United States, so come on, Pals, in foreign countries and islands in the seven seas, and write to me.—Bertie Martin, Campton, Georgia

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THE RENEGADE

by L. L. Foreman

The Story So Far:

A roving band of Comanches raid two wagons which had become separated from their caravan and kill the white emigrants with the exception of twelve-year-old Whopper Jim Aherne and two other children, Talitha and Weston Hathersall. Talitha and West escape with the help of Whopper, whose own life is saved when a hunting party of Black Horn Minniconjou Sioux arrives on the scene and wipes out the Comanches, their traditional enemies.

Whopper, whose spirit and bravery im-

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PART TWO

press the Sioux, is adopted by Yellow Eagle, one of the braves of the tribe. Known as Wapaha Jim, the boy is reared as a Sioux and in time becomes renowned as a warrior. Most of his coups are gained in battles with the Comanches, the Indians who killed his father and friends.

Meanwhile, West Hathersall, brought up in the East, has graduated from West Point. Eager for action against the Indians, he is sent to Fort Lincoln, which is under the command of the famous General Custer. Here an expedition is planned against the Sioux on the South Fork—Wapaha Jim's people—to force them within the limits of their reservation. Captain George Vaugant is to have charge of the expedition—and West Hathersall is named his second in command.

CHAPTER V

THE DESERTER

THE hunters had made good. They came riding home into the winter camp on the South Fork, singing their own praises, leading spare horses loaded with fresh meat that had frozen on the way, and the camp turned out to greet them. And among them rode a stranger, muffled in a bearskin overcoat, a black slouch hat pulled down over his cold ears. He wore boots and spurs, and his big horse was equipped with a white man's saddle and bridle. The

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saddle cloth was blue, with a yellow band of stitched tape following the edge, and a yellow "7" at the corner. The man's dark face was gaunt and stiff with the cold, and his eyes were frightened. He was a prisoner.

The camp eyed him curiously, but the real attention was for the fresh meat. Many hunting parties had returned empty-handed this winter, bitterly denouncing the white hunters who were killing off all the game in the country, and hunger had begun to make itself known. Bear Standing, the leader of the party, modestly accepted the congratulations and called to the eager women to come and cook meat. He noosed a rope around the captive's neck and tied him to a stake. Then he and the tired hunters sought rest and warmth in their lodges.

After the feasting that night, Bear Standing pointed to the prisoner, now sitting and eating with them. "He was camping alone last night when we saw his fire and crept up on him, and he did not fight. He had a long gun and a pistol. Now they are mine. He is a soldier. What shall we do with him?"

Chief Black Horn, gorged and sleepy, stirred his fat bulk by the fire. "Kill him!" he grunted.

The prisoner, paling under their unwinking regard and perhaps divining the drift of their talk, squirmed and slowly got to his feet. "I'm your friend!" he gasped. "Your friend—don't y'unnerstand? Me *amigo. Sabe amigo?*" He stared around at the dark, fire-lighted faces, and the last shred of his nerve broke under the strain.

"Great guns—don't none o' you talk American? Quit lookin' at me like that! I tell you I'm your friend!" His hoarse voice went throaty, and they saw with disgust that he shuddered.

To Wapaha Jim, sitting with the brothers of his warrior society, it came as a strange shock to hear the language of his own race spoken. He was ashamed, too, ashamed of that frightened man, and he stared into the fire and said nothing. Bad Buffalo, beside him, grinned wickedly and started to say something funny, but he changed his mind and kept silent after a glance at the face of his friend. Long ago they had gone through the solemn ceremony of blood brotherhood, and a brother could insult a brother in jest without offense; but there were limits.

Running Dog spoke up across the fire, dragging his voice to a sneer. "What says the shivering woman soldier? Does nobody know? You, Wapaha?" He nudged his father, and the chief clumsily entered into the play of barbed sarcasm.

"Wapaha, yes. He should know. Or has he forgotten the tongue of his white people? Wapaha, what says this brave white brother of yours?"

There were men who chuckled under their breaths at the broad malice. Black Horn and his son had their favored clique. There were others, warriors and friends of Wapaha Jim and Yellow Eagle, who frowned. Wapaha Jim stood high in the band as a warrior and man of council, and to jab at his dignity did not sit well with his friends.

The prisoner stared about him, fearful and uncomprehending, until Running Dog drew his knife and ran a thumb along the sharp blade, blandly studying the man's hair. That brought on another chuckle.

WAPAHA JIM rose. The active, untamed years had given him a tall and muscular body, splendidly proportioned and without the thin limbs of most Indians. His skin was

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brown and there were wound scars on his body that he did not bother to enhance with daubs of paint. He wore his hair long and knotted at the nape of his neck, adorned with one red feather. To wear the single plume was an act of such extreme modesty that it would have been arrogant presumption in most young warriors, but Wapaha's prestige was big enough to carry it without challenge. He was War Bonnet—a fighter known as a clever and daringly impudent raider of Crow horses, and a relentless scourge of Comanches. They talked about him in other camps. His fame was rising.

"I know the man's talk," he said, and fixed a long stare on Running Dog until the son of the chief reluctantly put away his knife. "He says he is our friend. Perhaps he is a messenger from the big soldier house."

He turned to the man, hesitated, and had to frame his query in his mind before he put it into English, "Are you a messenger from the fort?"

The man gave a start of relief. He peered at the browned face, saw the gray eyes, and let out a gusty breath of wonder. "Jumpin' Jehoshaphat—a white man! Ain't you white? Sure, I see y'are. A white renegade, by satan! Man, I'm sure glad to see you! Listen, you tell these cussed hostiles—"

"These what?" The expression was new to Wapaha Jim.

The man flinched at the curt interruption. "Your friends, I mean. Tell 'em I'm a friend, like you. Naw, I ain't no messenger. I went over the hill, *sabe?* Skipped the army. Deserted. I got news for 'em, though. you tell 'em that. Soldiers are comin' here! Some o' the Seventh Cavalry an' a bucko captain I'd like to skin alive."

"Soldiers coming here? Why?"

"Hell, you know why. Your bunch is hostiles. Sioux, ain't they? Well, then, the troops is comin' to bust up this camp, an' if they catch you—or me—huh! You powwow these Injuns an' tell 'em they better move pronto. Hell, tell 'em I was lookin' to join their bunch when they caught me. Wouldn't mind, at that. You look fed an' healthy. Plenty to eat, huh? Likker? An' women?"

Wapaha Jim turned to the curious faces around the fire. "This man ran away from the soldier house. He says soldiers are coming to attack us here. I do not believe him! He is a coward, and he lies because he hopes that we will feed and hide him. I say give him his horse and let him go. He is bad."

"Perhaps he is a spy," suggested Iron Breast, but Wapaha Jim shook his head.

"Why should the soldiers come against us? Have we ever harmed them? Did we not refuse to join Red Cloud when he made war on them, nine summers ago?"

Perversely, Black Horn took the other view. "I think the man speaks with a straight tongue," he declared, and nodded, heavily important. "The white soldiers have sent out word that all our people must give up this land and move away. This we know."

"We have heard such things before, but nothing happened," spoke up Yellow Eagle. He was getting old and shrunken in the face, but his eyes still held fire and his blunt force had not waned. "Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse have said that they will fight, and that is good, for we should not flee our hunting grounds. Our fathers and their fathers have lived and hunted and died here. Our boundaries are marked by the graves of our men and the bones of our

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ancestors, who fought to hold this land. But I think like Wapaha, who is my son. I think that it is only more talk, and nothing will happen."

"Has Wapaha talked again with spirits, then?" sneered Running Dog. "Has he taken council with his *wakan* war charm that he keeps in the pretty beaded pouch—the pouch that was made for it by the girl he has said is not his sister?" He looked directly at Long Mane, and laughed. For nine years the situation had teetered between joke and scandal, mentioned guardedly with sly grins by men, whispered over behind hooding blankets by women.

LONG MANE shot to his feet in one lithe movement. He seldom voiced himself upon any matter, and was known as a man who shunned friendship. Whenever he did speak, others listened because of the rarity of his words rather than their quality, for he had a stinging way of thrusting through the crust of a matter and dragging out something unpleasant. He had the dour face of an embittered poet, soured by frustrations and thoughts that had brewed too long in him.

"The white men are our friends, for they have many times told us so," he began, and pointed barbs edged through his thin mockery. "In our treaties with them they told us that our people may live forever in the Black Hills—also that we may hunt without harm as far south as the great river, as long as the buffalo lived. Their soldiers would protect us from other white men who might seek to take our land or spoil our hunting. Thus they pledged their friendship, and there was to be no more war. This was the treaty that Red Cloud agreed to when he stopped fighting."

His hearers grunted assent. Long Mane sank his voice to a soft crooning, his large eyes on Wapaha. "But white men found yellow metal in the Black Hills. They dug holes in the ground, and built villages there. They built an iron road across our land for their iron horses. They hunted our buffalo, first for meat and then for the hides, and where is the buffalo now? Our people tried to stop them. There was fighting again. Then the white soldiers came, as they had promised us. *Ma-ya*—they came! But it seems that these soldiers were not the ones who made the treaty. It seems that the white men have many chiefs, always changing, never thinking the same. These soldiers made a mistake. Perhaps they had not heard of the treaty. Or perhaps they forgot."

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His pseudo-tolerance was the essence of sarcasm. He paused, smiling gently, letting his words sink in, cleverly timing the next. "The chiefs of these soldiers spoke of new laws of which our people had never heard. But they protected our people. Yes. In a strange manner. They protected our people by driving them off their land and punishing them for killing white men!"

"*Ho!*" growled a warrior, getting stirred up. "*Ho*—this is true!" Many eyes took on a glitter around the fire, and blanketed men began swaying restlessly.

"Do not be angry," soothed Long Mane. His lean body swayed gently with the rest, his cavernous eyes glowing. For the moment, at least, he had them under his spell, flaying their fierce pride, whipping up their strong sense of injustice. "Do not be angry at the white men. They are your friends! Now they are coming to protect you again! They will take you to the reservation, and give you cow beef and flour to eat. You will not have to hunt any more, so they will take your weapons away, and perhaps your ponies. What use is a lance if there is no hunting? What use is a pony if you stay in one place? You will not need such things. You will forget that you were once warriors and men, and when you are old you will squat by the fire and mumble your stories to the children of your children, who will laugh behind your bent backs and call you liars, for they will never have seen any such things and will not believe in them. But perhaps they will believe you when you tell them about Long Mane, who stayed away to hunt and fight, and never crawled in to die of old age on the reservation!"

He was prophet and devil man. At last passion broke through the thin shell. His lips stretched and he flung up both arms. The hissing, choking syllable of his Fox Warrior brotherhood song came chanting forth, and now his voice was high and harsh:

> "*Tokalaka miye ca*—
> I am the Fox, always the Fox!
> Fighting, fighting—though alone;
> Fighting, standing—falling, dying—
> Then this Fox shall be no more!
> *Nakenula waon welo*—"

He broke off and brought his bitter eyes to bear again on Wapaha Jim. "May *Wakan Tanka* curse the white man for his crooked friendship!" he rasped, and glided off on swift, light-stepping feet.

LUTA-HO-OTA trotted her pony over the hump to the river, but as she crossed the hump she slowed and looked back at the camp, wishfully, as she had done a thousand times before, her hope never quite dying. But Wapaha Jim did not come out to follow her, although she had ridden openly across the *hocoka* past his lodge, as she usually made a point of doing whenever he was in camp. And, as usual, she tossed her head and called him names under her breath.

"Man of stone! Blind one! Man who sees no woman! Man of no love! *Sunka!* Dog—" She sighed, softening. "Beloved, look upon me!"

She went on down to the river out of sight of the camp, and sat with her knees cuddled, absently watching her pony drink from the cold, clear stream. The white pony had attained age but no sedateness, and drank delicately, cocking its ears at its reflection in the water and pretending a mild startlement. It snorted, hoping to gain some petting attention, but Luta-ho-ota was in a reverie of wonder at the stub-

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born stupidity of men. Just because they had once been friends, both Wapaha Jim and Long Mane scrupulously avoided her rather than precipitate a duel to the death. Silly! Wapaha must know that if it came to a fight, she—Luta-ho-ota—would certainly be on hand to slip in an arrow where it would do the most good if needed. *Ma-ya,* what a fool he was!

She did not see or hear the man in the bearskin overcoat come stepping quietly along the bank. The question as to the coming of the soldiers had not been settled but rather confused by Long Mane's declaration, and it had made a minor split in the camp. Some, siding with Black Horn and Running Dog, were for trekking north at once to join Crazy Horse. Others, cleaving to Yellow Eagle and Wapaha Jim, argued that the army deserter was a liar and that there was no real danger.

Wapaha Jim had staked his prestige on an opinion and a promise. "The man lies," he told them. "White soldiers would not attack a peaceful camp where there are women and children. If they do come, it will only be to tell us that we must move to the reservation. Let me talk to them, for I talk their tongue. I shall tell them that we do no harm here, and I think they will ride away and leave us in peace."

So, in a mingled atmosphere of uneasy distrust and hopeful faith, the camp left the matter to the future. In the meantime, the army deserter was allowed the freedom of the camp, within limits. Nobody cared much whether the man ran away or not, but he'd have to do it on foot. Bear Standing, after appropriating the cavalry horse and weapons as his just dues, took no more interest in the man.

THE deserter paused. His eyes sharpened on the white pony. To attempt stealing a pony from the hundreds belonging to the camp was too dangerous, guarded as they were. Too fraught with terrible consequences if he failed. But he had to get one somehow, and get away from here before that Fort Lincoln detachment came jingling in with the bucko captain at its head. The deserter studied the back of the girl speculatively, and touched his tongue to his lips. She was pretty. Damned pretty. He'd noticed her before. Maybe she'd run off with him; why not? He was a man, and white—well, white enough for an Injun girl to feel mighty proud to be his wife, anyway.

He moved on toward her, treading with care. Mustn't scare her too soon, or she'd be off like a shot. Let him get his arms around her, though, and it would be all right. Women were all the same. She'd soon quiet down and go along, happy as a dog with its master. He took a rapid look about him. Nobody in sight. The hump hid him and the girl from the camp. Nobody would see them ride off on that pony, and they wouldn't be missed for hours.

The pony backed leisurely from the stream, snuffling its nose against a foreleg, and its noises drowned out the cautious advance of the man.

When the two reaching hands touched her from behind, Luta-ho-ota screamed a little and jumped. She nearly got away, but the arms closed around her too fast, and her thick red blanket kept her from wriggling free. It slipped down around her own arms from off her shoulders, and the man held it tightly with one hand and pulled her around to face him, grinning down at her. Luta-ho-ota could read all that was in that

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grin, for men found her desirable and she had more than once had to cope with a too-ardent brave. So, wasting no strength in useless struggling, and too proud to scream for help, she stood quiet and passive, gazing steadily at him.

The man's grin broadened. This was easier than he had even hoped for. The girl was downright meek and willing. "All right, *querida,*" he muttered huskily. "*Sabe querido?* You come with me, huh?" He groped for the few Sioux phrases that he had picked up. "*Ku* . . . uh . . . with me, *yutonkal,* huh? On *tasunke,* there." He drew her close to him. "My squaw, huh? *Hiyupo!* Say, you're as pretty a li'le squaw as—"

The point of Luta-ho-ota's little knife pierced the blanket, down low, and jabbed him in the thigh. He let out a yelp and knocked her down. The pony stamped a hoof, but didn't leave.

Luta-ho-ota jumped up, furious, pulling her blanket into place. No man had ever gone so far as to resent her little knife so crudely. On other occasions it had been accepted as a straight answer, the recipient of the jab departed hurriedly and trying to recover his poise. So she was not prepared for a blow to follow, and she didn't dodge when the man hit her with his fist.

The man was in a rage. He cursed as he struck her, and his fist cracked on her forehead. Luta-ho-ota dropped with hardly a moan, and lay tangled in her red blanket. For a moment terror filled the man. But nobody had seen him. He caught the bridle of the pony. The hump was empty. He had a good pony and a clear road out. Some of his courage returned. He looked down at the senseless girl.

"Blasted li'le fool!" he muttered, and picked her up. She was light, and the pony was powerful. He mounted, took a last scrutiny about him, and headed the pony across the river in a splashing lope.

TOWARD evening he looked for a place to hide, where he could rest the pony. All afternoon, chill fears icing his spine, he had kept the horse to a punishing gait, but he took on more confidence as night drew near. He would rest the pony a spell, push on all night, and hole up somewhere tomorrow. In a day or two he could be out of the Sioux country. The girl rode behind him now, never a word out of her, meeting his eyes with silent hatred whenever he twisted to look back along his trail. He had taken her knife, and this was the only weapon between them. He knew that she was only biding her chance, and he feared and hated her because of it.

On their right ran a narrow stream bordered with timber and brushwood, and off to the left the valley of the stream was bounded by rolling hills with here and there a patch of snow in the shaded hollows. The deserter reined aside to a hollow between two hills, but before entering it he drew in and took a long look back. Nothing moving showed anywhere. The sun had not yet gone down, and he thought that by the time it was full dark he could push on again.

"It's goin' to be a hungry camp," he said to the girl, "but if I can do without eatin', so can you. Git off."

Although the air was getting cold, he was afraid to start a fire for warmth. After unsaddling the pony and tying it out, he huddled in his bearskin coat and stared sullenly at the girl. "I reckon I'll tie you, you

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li'le she devil. What you lookin' at? Come here!"

The girl said something, and a kind of tired horror came over her face. She stood looking past him, and the man said again, "Come here!" But he turned to see what she might be looking at, and then he saw them. He saw much too late to do anything, and was too paralyzed by fear to try. He sat huddled and staring.

In the light of the sinking sun the string of Comanches appeared like red ghosts on horseback, and their wiry little mounts made little sound as they came on at a walk in single file down into the hollow. Riders and ponies were accustomed to furtive travel. There was no shouting, not a war whoop, and not any special hurry. The situation did not require any. The Comanches had seen that the man and girl were unarmed. They merely walked their ponies down until they formed a ring around them, as if going through an unsmiling clownery of a slow attack, then wheeled their ponies inward to the circled pair and stopped.

The girl stood unmoving. She knew what to expect, and stoic courage rose to aid her. It was not in her nature to do a useless act, so she did not scream or try to break through the ring.

The white man shivered, getting stumblingly to his feet. *"Ho!"* he whispered, swallowed, and tried again. *"Ho!* Me friend. *Amigo. Sabe amigo? Kola*—me *kola!"*

They knew some Spanish. For generations their tribesmen had raided down into Mexico. They had no friends there. They knew a word or two of Sioux. The Sioux were warriors who killed any Comanches they caught poaching on their lands. But the deserter could have spoken in fluent Comanche, had he been able, and done no better. He was a stranger, therefore an enemy. Also, he possessed a horse and a woman, in themselves sufficient incentive for murder.

He plodded shakily to the one he took to be the leader, a man with a flat face and a broken nose, wearing a ragged and filthy blue tunic and a Mexican saber. "Me *kola!"* he gasped, and took off his bearskin overcoat. "Here—for you!"

The Comanche slid a lazy look at the coat, the man, and around the circle, and Luta-ho-ota sensed silent laughter rippling around her. The deserter dragged a tobacco can from his pocket. "Here—this, too. Smoke. Yours."

Casually, the Comanche took the tobacco. He took the bearskin coat and laid it across his pony. He reached down and plucked off the deserter's black campaign hat. With cold laughter in his eyes, he drew the Mexican saber from its tarnished scabbard.

The sun had not quite vanished when the Comanches trooped back over the hill, among them a white pony ridden by a girl in a red blanket. Down in the hollow behind them they left a hacked and scalped bundle that had once been a man.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOSTILES

"COMANCHES!" Those with Wapaha Jim grunted corroboration, examining in the moonlight the tracks of ponies and moccasins. They gathered around the hacked body in the hollow, and inspected it.

"Fourteen," said Bad Buffalo. He had counted the tracks. He squatted on his heels and pointed with his chin. "They went that way and took the white pony with them. It is unlucky that we are so few."

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There would have been only the three of them, but Running Dog and five friends, happening to be starting out on a hunt at the time, had joined them in the pursuit. Wapaha Jim had been in no mood to dally and organize a large party after discovering the loss of Luta-ho-ota and the deserter, and neither had Long Mane, while Bad Buffalo was never one to give much excess time to preparations. The signs in the earth down by the river told them all they needed to know, and they had hoped to catch up with their quarry before nightfall.

Long Mane swung onto his pony again and started off, saying nothing. He had not spoken all the way. Running Dog, looking at all the tracks, called after him: "Wait! We must send back for more men before we go farther."

Long Mane didn't even glance back. He rode on up the hill, following the tracks, and Wapaha Jim loped after him. Bad Buffalo rose, vaulted onto his pony with shambling agility and caught up with them. He had never gained much height, was still short and chunky, so ungraceful that the women laughed at him behind his back; but few men could match his enormous strength and bewildering swiftness of movement.

Running Dog brought up the rear, muttering with his friends: "Those three are fools! We should let them go on alone. To risk death in the darkness, and only because a woman has—"

It was getting close to dawn when with one accord they halted their ponies and sat motionless. The tracks, not more than two or three hours old, had brought them through a series of rolling hills to a valley. They were in unfamiliar country, avoided by their hunting parties because of its dry barrenness—but here lay a sheltered valley with a grassed and timbered floor and a narrow stream winding through it. A perfect site for a snug winter camp, for men who wished to live unseen and undisturbed, and did not mind riding far abroad for game.

And the camp was there, down there on the level floor and handy to the stream. A big camp. The startled watchers counted over thirty lodges, and looked down on a pony herd that covered a large meadow just north of the camp. They had stumbled upon a hidden Comanche stronghold, the headquarters of some marauding band that, raiding this far north last year, had elected to remain through the winter for reasons best known to itself.

RUNNING DOG was first to utter a whisper. "Quick—let us get away from here before their dogs smell us and bark!" He began edging his pony back along the shallow draw through which they had come.

"They have no dogs, or we would have heard them earlier, howling at the moon," murmured Wapaha Jim. "Long Mane, do you see a white pony? Down there, see? Not with the herd. Her pony never would stay with the others. She petted it too much."

"I see it. And she?"

"I don't know. Those who brought her here are tired and sleeping. Later they will make the scalp dance, and she will be painted and brought out. Bad Buffalo and I have spied on Comanche camps and seen them do these things."

"And turned their stamping into a death dance, with arrows, before we slipped away!" grinned Bad Buffalo. "I see a dark lodge. Is it red?

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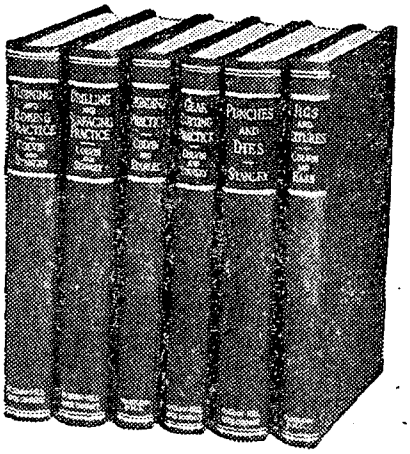

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Perhaps the medicine lodge. In there?"

"Perhaps. I go down to find out." Wapaha Jim began taking the saddle off his pony.

"*I* go down!" said Long Mane.

"Fools!" hissed Running Dog. "I say we go home and make up a big war party. Obey me!"

Wapaha Jim finished stripping his pony of everything except the hair rope braided into the mane. "It will be too late, after they make the scalp dance," he pointed out. "And you are not the leader, Running Dog. I am the leader, and I am the man who has first right to seek Luta-ho-ota." He looked at Long Mane, and added simply: "She is my sister."

Long Mane moved impulsively to touch him, but his habit of reserve checked him. His large eyes turned young and eloquent. "Yes, Wapaha," he said muffledly. "She is your sister. We hear you. Tell us what we must do."

"The ponies?" suggested Bad Buffalo.

Wapaha Jim nodded. "Yes. You, Long Mane, and you, Bad Buffalo—creep down to the meadow. If I get into trouble, then stampede their ponies and run them off. They will come out and chase you, and perhaps that will give me a chance to get away if I find Luta-ho-ota. You, Running Dog, and you others—I ask you to help us. You have guns. We shall come back this way, if we come at all. Shoot those who come after us. Drive them back and keep them from shooting at us. We rely on you."

Softly he chanted the song of the Dog Warriors, making his vow of devotion and demanding their vows in return. *"Kola, taku otehika . . . Imakuwapi-lo . . . Waon welo!"* He looked questioningly at them, and Running Dog nodded.

"Hiyupo!" breathed Bad Buffalo,

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and went snaking off on foot with Long Mane.

Wapaha Jim climbed onto his saddleless pony, lay flat along its back, and let it drift idly down toward the camp. Its unshod hoofs set up little sound on the grass and sandy soil. Any Comanche sentinel, noticing it but not its flattened rider in the darkness, might think it a pony of the camp that had strayed and was now returning.

The pony was brown and inconspicuous. It ambled on down the slope, choosing its own footing, but unobtrusively guided by its rider toward the grazing white pony below. The white pony lifted its head and nickered, sniffing a familiar scent. This was the initial risk, and there was no way to guard against it. Wapaha Jim eased over onto the hidden side of his plodding mount, hung there with his left arm through the braided hair rope and a toe hooked along the backbone, and cocked the loaded army pistol that he had borrowed from Bear Standing.

The white pony nickered again more loudly, stretching its neck and stepping daintily to meet an old friend. It snuffed at the brown, shivering with pleasure. It pricked its ears at Wapaha Jim and nuzzled his hair. Wapaha Jim hung motionless, peering under the neck of his mount. He caught a movement among the lodges. A dark and blanketed shape, noiseless and suspicious by lifelong habit, was prowling out to investigate the noises of the pony.

The man halted less than thirty yards away, hooded face turned toward the two ponies, and both animals broke off their nuzzled greetings to eye him at first in mild curiosity. The brown, catching a foreign whiff, snorted and sidled off with its ears laid back. The presence of strangers always brought out its meanest disposition. The white caught the alarm of the brown and planted its legs apart like a colt, provocative and skittish, ready to wheel off and bolt if the man approached too closely. For a full minute the man scrutinized them. At last, after a long look at the quiet pony herd farther up the valley, he paced off back among the lodges.

WAPAHA JIM slowly let out his held breath. Dawn was on the way, but he allowed more time to go by before putting his feet to the ground. He laid a carefully gentle hand on the white pony, patting the sleek neck. He ran his palm down the nose and rubbed the soft muzzle.

"*Ho,* petted and foolish beast," he whispered into the twitching ear, "you know Wapaha, don't you? Are we not old friends?"

The white pony shivered again, arching its neck self-consciously, coy as a kitten, thrusting its muzzle into the fondling hand. The brown pushed in, jealous. Wapaha Jim slipped the hair rope over the neck of the white, loosely attaching both animals together before they knew it, and left them. They stood quietly together, comforted by each other's presence, gazing after him as he crept in among the high, narrow-topped lodges. Had he used less tact they would have been nervous, all keyed up to bolt at the first frightening sound.

He heard occasional sounds within some of the lodges as he tiptoed past. The camp was beginning to stir awake. Dropping to a crawl, he came up to the red lodge. The buffalo-hide flap was laced shut from the outside, and a tufted red lance leaned against it to warn off any-

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body from entering the forbidden place. Such signs were conclusive, and Wapaha Jim breathed deeply again. He did not disturb the flap or the lance of the medicine man, but crawled on around to the back, and with his knife he punctured the stiff hide. He cut a rough half circle, bent back the section, and crawled through.

It was dark inside the lodge, but a small fire smoldered feebly in the center of the floor, and Wapaha Jim made out the shapes of several big kettles ranged around it. Drying bundles of herbs hung from the walls and slanted tepee poles, and the close air was heavy with odors. Something moved with a muffled rustling, and he heard breathing. Lying crouched on the floor, he picked the location of the sounds as being somewhere on the other side of the dying fire. Whatever it was that made them, it was awake and listening.

Wapaha Jim raised the cocked pistol and put his chances on a low whisper. "Luta-ho-ota—is it you?"

The answer came in a gasp. "Wapaha! Oh, Wapaha—you!"

Luta-ho-ota lay between robes on the floor, and when he darted around the fire to her he tripped over a rope. She was staked out under the covers, wrists and ankles attached with ropes to stakes too far off for her to reach. Wapaha Jim used his knife again, and lifted the girl to her feet. She shook badly, her muscles cramped, and clung to him.

"Oh, Wapaha! I prayed that you come before the day and the dance! I made prayers to *Wakan Tanka* and to—"

He hushed her swiftly with a hand over her mouth, and they stood listening together. He saw terror in the dark shine of her eyes. His own were glittering, narrowed. Somebody was outside the lodge, unlacing the flap and being quiet and deft about it. A strip of rawhide rasped softly, and the flap rippled, a thin sliver of gray dawn light appearing near the bottom.

A respectful voice uttered a morning greeting, and moccasined feet padded on by toward the river. The unknown one answered with a grunt that sounded annoyed, and worked with less quiet care at the flap.

WAPAHA JIM hustled the girl across the lodge to the gap that he had cut. It was nearly light outside now. "Your pony and mine—under the big cottonwood near the path," he whispered. "Hurry!" He pushed her through.

The flap folded open, and a heavily wrapped figure ducked into the lodge, drawing the flap shut behind him. He took a step to the pile of robes, and stopped, his attention taken suddenly by the hole in the rear wall. A growl started in his throat, and his eyes widened in an amazed glare at the crouched shape of Wapaha Jim, who was backing out.

There was nothing else to be done, so Wapaha Jim pulled the trigger of his pistol. After the brief spurt and loud report, the wrapped figure whirled totteringly and plunged out of the lodge, screaming as he fell outside.

There was no period of wondering aftermath, no shocked inaction. The camp burst alive with a roar. Comanche reactions were always immediate. But even before the first warrior erupted from his lodge the pony herd was in motion, scared mad by the howling and waving of Long Mane and Bad Buffalo. Everything happened with the explosive suddenness of a stepped-on tomcat, and Wapaha Jim felt again the grim relish of setting off a thunderbolt

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among men who considered themselves masters in the art of surprise. A warrior, clutching a carbine, slid to a halt on bare feet and changed his mind about running to help save the ponies. He threw up the carbine to fire, but the pistol spat and beat him to the shot, and Wapaha Jim plucked up the falling carbine on his running way to the cottonwood.

Astride the white pony, Luta-ho-ota held the brown from bolting in the noisy confusion. Men, most of them hurrying from their couches, were obeying the first impulse of the raided, racing to protect their indispensable ponies. Long Mane and Bad Buffalo were doing good work. They could be seen tearing back and forth on stolen mounts, waving their blankets and driving the mass of ponies in a thundering stampede up the valley.

Bad Buffalo raised himself up on his pony, bouncing and weaving, and anxiously looked back. Wapaha Jim waved to him as he leaped onto the brown, and even at that distance he saw Bad Buffalo flash his big teeth in a grin and shout across to Long Mane. There was no real hope that they could get away with the herd, but at least they could keep the Comanches worried and busy chasing them for a while.

"*Hopo*—let's go!" Wapaha Jim called to the girl, and put his pony to a dead run for the path up through the hills. The Comanche camp boiled with commotion, and some women began a wail for the dead, but so far no shooting cracked from the hills where Running Dog and his five friends had been left posted.

A piece of flesh flicked off Wapaha Jim's left shoulder with a sting of pain, and he hipped around. He let Luta-ho-ota ride by him up the slope, and tried a shot at a small group of men coming along fast after them on foot. One dropped out, limping, but the rest took to running zigzag course and came on, and he began to wonder about Running Dog and others. This was their task, to turn back pursuers and discourage close shooting.

Wapaha Jim sent a Sioux yell of taunting defiance at the group and caught up with the white pony, but a premonition rose uneasily in him. If Running Dog and the others were not on hand, it would be bad. There were many Comanches able to wear down a pony in a long chase on foot, and they seldom quit easily when their prideful desire for vengeance was as aroused as it was now. The brown and the white raced on, side by side, and their hoofs cut sand in a tight wheel into the draw between the hills.

"Where are the others?" called the girl.

"Ask the wind!" Wapaha Jim rapped back. "Gone, that great warrior of the big voice—that son of a chief, Running Dog! May he die in darkness!" He thrust the pistol to her. "Take this. I have the carbine and my knife. Save your pony. We have far to go, and we make no stops."

"*Tziksu weta tariruta, Sicé,*" responded the girl obediently, happily. The words were not words commonly used between sister and brother. "My faith is in your power, beloved." Her shining eyes said that the devotedly desperate act of saving her from the Comanches had been beyond that of a mere brother, giving her the right and glory to speak such intimate words aloud, where before she had only whispered them in secret loneliness.

But Wapaha Jim's mind was on Bad Buffalo and Long Mane, back there in the valley and making a

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running fight of it, expecting help from Running Dog and not getting it.

"*Ho, Wakan Tanka,*" he prayed, "give speed and good luck to my two friends back there, and place your curse on those who abandoned us!"

When next he looked back the group of Comanches had strung out, settling down to an all-day dog trot, following the two ponies with relentless patience.

CHAPTER VII

THE RAID

RUNNING DOG said angrily: "Are we fools who must be led by fools?" He said it in reply to one of the five riding home with him—Blue Beaver—who had remarked that bad luck might come of this.

"What shall we say when we are asked where they are, those three?" queried Blue Beaver uncomfortably. "They are surely killed or captured by the Comanches. We live and are without wounds or trophies. How shall we talk of this?"

"We shall say that we do not know," growled Running Dog. "We shall say that they left us. Let us pick up that dead soldier on our way and take him back with us. We shall say that we caught and killed him, but Luta-ho-ota was not with him, and those three were not then with us and we do not know what became of them. The dead one will be our proof and our trophy. *Wagh*—leave all that to me, and let any man beware who calls me a liar! Come, let us hurry. The Comanches may be hunting us."

In the afternoon they sighted the trees fringing the narrow stream, and came upon their own tracks leading away from the hollow. Blue Beaver threw up a hand for a halt, and pointed. "Smoke! Somebody is there!" He gestured widely. "Let us go around and cross the stream."

They struck the stream at a point well below the curling drift of smoke, crossed it, and warily worked their way up along the brushy bank until they were opposite the hollow where the dead deserter had been left. At once Blue Beaver slipped an arrow to his bowstring, and a warrior beside him thoughtfully thumbed back the hammer of his musket.

"Soldiers! He spoke straight words, that one. They come to hunt our camp and to attack it! Horses—they have good horses! Big, like the one that dead coward rode. And guns!"

"Wa-aa-agh!" A warrior pinched in his lips and glared hatred across the stream. "Could we steal some of those fine horses? Look, they dig a hole for that dead one."

EIGHT troopers took turns at digging the grave, using tin mugs and knives. The rest of the detachment rubbed down the horses, and aired saddle cloths, or stood around the fire, making coffee. The sun was warm, and most of them had peeled off their thick fur overcoats. They were a tough and seasoned bunch of men, taking long riding and short rations in their stride. Their faded and casual smartness was not that of the city barracks and newly brisk recruits. The yellow cavalry stripes against the blue, and the wide-brimmed campaign hats, added to an air of rakishness that fitted well into the raw country. They were aware of their toughness. Prided themselves on it. The Seventh Cavalry was a tough outfit, a crack outfit, and if anybody didn't know it he

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was soon informed.

Captain Vaugant straightened up from inspecting the body. He hitched his belt and tugged the crease from his coat. "I guess it's that half-breed, all right. Hard to tell. They chopped him up pretty bad."

"Ghastly," said West Hathersall. "The damned fiends!" He felt a little sick and looked away. "George, you've got your hands . . . ugh . . . dirty."

Vaugant glanced at them, and at his second in command. "Mm-m-m, somewhat." Because of the troopers within hearing, he kept to military formality. "Mr. Hathersall, a man has to develop a—well, call it a protective philosophy. Doctors have to have it, too, or they'd break down. It may be a form of callousness, but it's very necessary. And, after all, this fellow was a deserter."

"He wore our uniform, didn't he?"

"True . . . true," Vaugant conceded. "He could have been a loyal and capable trooper, and they'd have done the same thing to him. The hostiles are not discriminating in their murders. Sergeant, send a man down to the stream for some water, will you? I want to wash my hands.

"This certainly seems to prove that the Indians along this country are hostiles," he went on musingly, and shrugged. "No surprise, that. They're all on the warpath. It's spreading like grass fire." He picked a broken feather out of the trampled dirt. "Looks like a Sioux head feather, doesn't it, sergeant? The Sioux did it, of course. Probably some of the same band we're looking for. Say, what's the matter with that man you sent down

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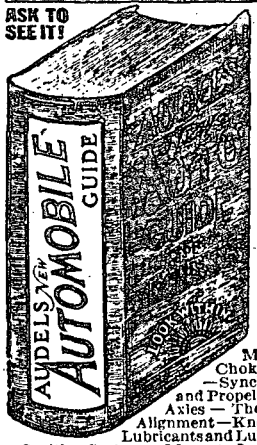

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there? Hey, soldier—I'm waiting for that water!"

The trooper down at the stream dipped in his canvas bucket and came back at a smart pace. "Something over there on the far bank, sir," he reported. "Might be a buffalo calf or the like, caught in the brush. Sounded like it. Kind o' bawled one time, real low."

"Yes? Hope you're right. Sergeant, ride over there with a couple of men and look around. We could use some fresh meat."

They watched the sergeant and two troopers trot their horses down to the stream, riding bareback and carrying their carbines. Men left off rubbing down their mounts to look, and others cheerfully began building up the fire and cutting sticks in readiness for the roasting. The three riders splashed across the stream and climbed their dripping animals up onto the far bank.

"Spread out, sergeant," Vaugant called, and strolled down after them, drying his washed hands. "It may be a bear. If it is, you better give it plenty of—" He didn't finish. His right hand smacked his holster.

THE sergeant, who had turned around to acknowledge the command, fell off his pony without speaking, and his booted feet followed his head into the thick brush. There was no sound to account for it. His horse halted at once, dipped an inquiring nose down at him, and snorted, backing away. The two surprised troopers closed in to see what was wrong. One of them sat up straight with a spasmodic jerk that lost him his carbine, and this time the watchers in the hollow glimpsed the brief shimmer of the arrow. The other trooper fired into the brush while he swung his mount around, and another shot answered him. His horse leaped, unseating him, but he kept hold of the reins

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when he tumbled, and then it was a struggle between them, the animal out of control and kicking.

Vaugant broke into a run, barking a short command. He was cool; emergencies never flurried him. Only personal emotions could wreck the hard calm of his army ego. His men grabbed their arms and came pelting after him, but before they could reach the stream it was all over on the other side. Two copper-brown men rose from nowhere and jumped the trooper struggling with his wounded mount. The horse got away, but the other two animals were seized by three more Indians. One of them snatched up the sergeant's carbine and took quick aim at the runaway horse, preferring to kill it if he couldn't capture it.

Vaugant, far in front of his men, loosed a pistol shot at him. The Indian fired and dropped the horse with his first shot. He changed his aim promptly and fired again, crowing like an exultant boy when Vaugant pitched headlong into the water.

Then, like bizarre puppets tugged neatly off scene at the conclusion of their allotted act, the Indians were gone, and the steel plates of the two captured army mounts beat loudly through the drumming of unshod ponies. West Hathersall got to Vaugant and hauled him out of the stream, half drowned and senseless.

"Easy, there, men—stay together! What? Yes, go get the sergeant and those two men and bring them back here. Unpack the medical kit. Get back and guard the horses, some of you! Watch the ammunition packs! Trumpeter! Where's that trumpeter?"

It was half an hour before West Hathersall quite realized that the raid had not been the preliminary to a grand attack, and that all emergency was past. By that time Vaugant was lying on his back and quietly swearing, paralyzed by the splitting agony of a bullet-chipped skull.

"Seargeant McGill's dead, sir," reported a corporal. "So's Bucknell, an' Morris is in a bad way. Three mounts an' three carbines lost. They took Mac's hair, too, the painted devils."

"Help me up, Mr. Hathersall," muttered Vaugant. "Damnation! Not more than half a dozen of 'em, and look what they did to us. From that camp we're looking for, I'll wager. Well, we'll know what to expect when we . . . we— Blast it, I'm going to faint again!"

He fainted, and West and the corporal caught him. The corporal cocked a meditative eye at his lieutenant. "Shall I give orders to break camp an' start back for the fort, sir?" he suggested. "The captain needs doctoring. Maybe his head's busted."

But West wanted to push on in search of that Sioux camp. He hadn't proved himself yet. "If the captain is no better by tonight we'll return to the fort," he granted at last. "Meantime, post lookouts and tell them to keep sharp watch."

ALONG toward sundown the corporal hurried down to the fire and saluted briskly. "Two horsemen coming this way, sir, from over yonder. The lookout on the hill says they're Injuns."

Men within hearing passed the word, and there was general movement. Vaugant, sitting up and nursing his head, automatically drew his pistol. Pain made his face look gaunt, and his eyes were bloodshot.

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"Good!" he said, and blinked unseeingly at the corporal. "Let 'em come. Keep everybody below the skyline. If they're Sioux let me know."

Minutes later the corporal returned. "I guess they're Sioux all right, sir." Eagerness flattened his tone. Sergeant McGill had been popular. "They're making straight for here, so I reckon they didn't sight our smoke before we put the fire out. Act like they're on the prowl."

"Coming to find out if we're gone yet, the brazen blackguards," commented Vaugant. "Mr. Hathersall, hold the men in hand and don't let them fire unless I give the order. We want to make sure of this pair. May get some information from them."

The detachment waited in dead silence, and kept that silent immobility when a head bobbed into sight up the hill, followed by another. Both riders jogged into full view, topping the hill. Instantly they reined their ponies half around and stopped, peering down at the soldiers in the hollow. Obviously they were startled. The smaller rider, muffled in a red blanket and seated on a white pony, moved to take flight. The tall one with a feather in his hair put out a hand restraining his companion. He rode forward a few steps and held out his hand again, this time above his head, the palm turned outward to the soldiers, and he sat there waiting for his gesture of peace to be returned by then.

Even to the bitterly prejudiced eyes of West Hathersall, the man made a striking picture, all red and black against the sky and the sinking sun shining on him. His brown pony drooped a little tiredly, but he sat as straight as a guardsman, and although his features were too far off to be plainly visible he appeared to be smiling. His calm poise was impressive, but the troopers saw it as an astounding arrogance, particularly when they noticed that he carried what looked to be an army carbine. Two troopers by the picket line adjusted their sights and took careful aim. The corporal warned them in a low voice not to fire yet, and they nodded. Vaugant shifted his pistol to his left hand, to leave his right free to beckon the pair on down.

The movements could be seen by the alert eyes on the hill. The tall warrior shook his head urgently. His companion took more direct action. A high little cry of alarm, a kick of heels, and the white pony took off. The brown spun around to follow, and then every trooper threw butt to shoulder.

"Aim for their horses, men!" Vaugant called, and his pistol rapped quick reports in the flurried discharge of carbines.

The white pony swerved and lost its head. Never having been trained as a war pony, it didn't know what to do in a situation like this. It was frightened at the shattering noise and the strange behavior of its rider, who slumped over its neck and tried to hang on, both arms hugging it. It ran a circling course around the top of the hill, and stamped to a trembling halt only when its rider slipped off and rolled over on the ground.

THE troopers, shooting, saw the tall warrior wrench his brown mount in a slithering curve and come tearing back for his fallen companion. Some of them had seen such acts of devotion before among the

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hostiles, and it no longer astonished them, but they could still admire the suicidal courage of it. Dragging his mount back onto its haunches, the warrior leaped from its bare back. He cried out in a deep and savage voice as he picked up the limp body in his arms, and he laid it with swift care over the white pony, while bullets dug up dirt around him. He tied the red blanket with a tug, fastening on the body, and slapped the white pony on its way.

"Get him! Don't let him get away!" Vaugant barked, and cursed because his legs were too shaky to stand on. "Go up there after him and bring him in!"

Half a dozen troopers started up the hill ahead of the rest. The warrior turned on them with a snarl. His carbine cracked three times, and he didn't stand still while he fired, for he was vaulting onto his pony and charging down at them, but three of the troopers quit.

"Confound it, give me my rifle, somebody!" Vaugant clawed his way to his piled belongings. "I'll drop him! Why, look at that devil! Look, he's—"

The warrior made his lone charge and descended upon the remaining three of the forward group, and he wasn't bluffing to strike a coup. He was gripped by a deadly cold rage, utterly unlike anything they had ever seen. He struck one trooper with a sweep of his carbine, rode down the other two and bowled them over, and it looked likely that he would keep on coming and attack the camp, single-handed. He looked capable of trying it, and the total unexpectedness of his berserk charge had already set the whole detachment back on its boot heels, but he fired one last shot into them and whirled back up the hill. The last they saw of him, he was pounding off after the white pony, and as he rode over the hill he looked back

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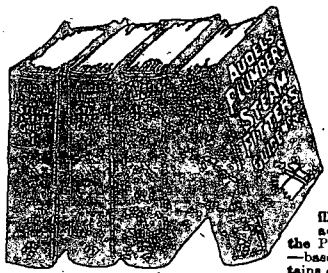

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and shook his carbine high in the air. Then the mad apparition was gone.

WEST HATHERSALL found himself futilely clicking an empty pistol. "By Jupiter!" he breathed. "If the Indians fight like that!"

"They don't, thank the gods—not often," muttered Vaugant, himself somewhat dazed. "That devil! Take a squad and go after him. I don't expect you to catch him, but you can try. Turn back when it gets dark. Phew! Never saw anything like it!"

A trooper came limping down the hill, helping another who sagged in the middle. "Mahogany Christopher!" he blurted. "What kind of Injun was that?"

"Wasn't Injun," mumbled the wounded man. He raised a sick and shocked face to Vaugant. "His eyes wasn't Injun. I saw 'em! Gray, they was, like a white man's. Like a crazy white man. A white renegade! He was crazy, I tell you!"

"So are you," grunted Vaugant. "Somebody give the man a drink. Bring the injured here, and hand me that medicine kit. Great gods o' war—wait'll Custer hears about this!"

West Hathersall rode back in with his squad long after sundown. "Lost him in the dark," he reported briefly to Vaugant. He looked uncertainly at the wounded men around the fire, and lastly at the captain. "Corporal Dunnington thinks one of them was a woman. The small one. The one we . . . uh . . . that got hit. I hope he's wrong."

"You do, eh? Well, so do I. Come to think of it, that one did act like a woman. Too bad. But take a look at that." Vaugant nodded at a cavalry dragoon pistol lying on his blanket. "The trumpeter found it right where that wild man made his stand. Must have been dropped by

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the one we hit. It's a late issue and one of ours. Taken from the fellow we found chopped up, of course. Those two had a hand in the chopping, so don't get to grieving too much about the woman—if it was a woman."

West nodded. "I suppose you're right. Still—" He gazed up the hill. "I hate Indians, but I can't get over the way that one risked his life to save the woman. And she was dead, you know. It . . . it must have hit him hard to make him act like that. He went mad."

"I've known of white men who went mad that way, too," said Vaugant harshly. "White men whose wives were killed—or their parents—by Indians! Sorry. I didn't mean to bring that up."

"It's all right." West turned his paled face away. "Yes, a man does go mad when that happens. Or whenever he thinks about it. That fellow had some revenge on us, and that's something. I wonder if that'll satisfy him, though. Oh, damn! It's a rotten business when women get caught in it, isn't it? Or kids. There was a boy who was killed along with my parents, and his father, too. I liked him. So did Tally. If he'd lived, I'd never have wanted a better friend. There was something about him that—well, you know how it is. Once in a lifetime you meet somebody like that, and you're friends for life. Unforgettable. Tally feels just the same way. His name was Jim Aherne. Whopper Jim, we called him—"

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH AND DEPARTURE

IT had snowed in the night, and this morning the wind brushed up drifts against the tepees and kept the old people huddling around the fires. Winter, that had struck only lightly so far, now threatened to come in late and break its mild promises. The river was freezing over; it would have a solid coat before long, for the sky was sunless and the wind came moaning out of the north.

Somebody set up a shouting and ran through the whitened camp. "*Ho*, Yellow Eagle! He comes—Wapaha comes!"

Even the shivering ancients turned out with the rest, mumbling and incredulous. Black Horn, waddling from his warm lodge, sent an agitated look at Running Dog, who wrapped his robe about himself and stood silent in the crowd. Running Dog had told a convincing story that had left few hopes for the lives of those who had not returned with him and his party.

Expectant eyes scrutinized the pair of ponies coming plodding through the snow, and a hush fell slowly over the crowd. The ponies were played out, staggering along with dragging hoofs and hanging heads. A red-blanketed bundle hung across the back of the white horse. The man on the brown rode with bowed head and shoulders slumped, like a dead man propped up. Here was no warrior returning in triumph. Old Pehangi uttered a long, low wail, and Yellow Eagle did a rare thing; he put an arm around the shoulders of his woman while he kept his eyes on that red bundle, and he drew her close to him.

When the two ponies shuffled to a standstill before the hushed crowd, Wapaha Jim raised his head with an effort. He was half frozen, so stiff with the cold that he could not dismount. His blued lips cracked when he moved them, and bled, and

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at first he could not speak. Then his wind-inflamed eyes blurred, and he could not see Yellow Eagle come to his side, but he felt the hand touching his arm, and heard the voice.

"Wapaha, my son . . . you are home."

"She is dead," said Wapaha Jim. He stared blindly before him. "They killed her. Soldiers. They did this thing. I led her to their camp, and told her not to fear. We went in peace. But they fired on us. White soldiers. Where is Pehangi? Take her, Pehangi; she is cold. I brought her home to you. We saved her from the Comanches before the scalp dance—but the soldiers killed her." He heard the growl of the crowd, and old Pehangi's wail. His eyes were bleak.

"From this day let no man call me white," Wapaha Jim mumbled. "Help me, Yellow Eagle. My hands and my feet—I must save them. I must live and be well, to fight the soldiers who come to kill my people. We must join Crazy Horse and fight!"

They carried him into the lodge, and Yellow Eagle and the shaman worked over him and the agony poured into his limbs. He gave out no sound, and closed his eyes. They brought in Luta-ho-ota and laid her down, and there was angry talk going on around him. He heard a shouting outside, and then heard no more.

OPENING his eyes later, Wapaha Jim found a familiar stocky figure bending over him and examining his feet and hands. Bad Buffalo had his face frozen on one side, giving him a hideous leer. He still wore furs and he was dirty from the trail, and smelled strongly of blood and horse. Behind him old Pehangi sat on her heels and cried, rocking to and fro, at the same time attending to a cooking kettle at the fire. Yellow Eagle, lighting his own best pipe, handed it to the stocky warrior and gestured toward the steaming kettle. The law of hospitality took precedence over grief. Bad Buffalo had no woman of his own to care for him.

"You will be well again, Wapaha," Bad Buffalo said between grateful puffs at the pipe. "You and I will ride and hunt and fight together again. We got away with some of the Comanche ponies. When we were cold we killed two and cut them open, and put in our hands and feet to save ourselves from freezing. *Ma-ya*, they were good ponies, too, but they had to die. We ate some of them. We worried about you and Luta-ho-ota."

"She is dead, Bad Buffalo. Soldiers—"

Bad Buffalo nodded, warming his hands around the bowl of the pipe. "We have been told. When you are well, you and I will go and pay them—*lo!*"

"Long Mane?"

"He is here." Bad Buffalo shifted to let Wapaha see. He shook his head at Yellow Eagle, declining the food offered him. "I do not eat until I have done that which shall cool my heart."

Long Mane stood at the foot of Luta-ho-ota's couch, his back straight, shoulders sloped and head sunk forward, his large eyes fixed steadily on the reposed face of the dead girl. He seemed in a trance, like a man living in remote and visionary thoughts. His lean face was slack and haggard, as lifeless of expression as that one on the couch, and when Wapaha Jim spoke softly

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to him he remained silent and oblivious.

Bad Buffalo got up and went to him. He laid a square and dirty paw on his shoulder and offered him the pipe, but left him alone after a moment of waiting.

"His heart is dead," he said simply, and handed the pipe back to Yellow Eagle. His frozen face twitched horribly. The battle glare entered his eyes. He worked his dirty hands and stared about him, and by the blind look of him Wapaha Jim knew what was coming.

"Wait, Bad Buffalo! Help me out there. Let me fight that crooked-tongued dog! It is my fight! Yellow Eagle!"

But there was no stopping Bad Buffalo. There had never been any way of stopping him when the killing rage rose up in him. He snatched up the nearest weapon at hand—Yellow Eagle's short, heavy lance—and shambled out of the lodge, growling. Wapaha Jim rolled from his couch and hobbled to the door, but Yellow Eagle caught him and held him in his arms.

"Give him this fight," cried Yellow Eagle. "He has sworn to do this. If he fails, then you and I will take his place."

Bad Buffalo lumbered through the crowd outside, and those he shouldered out of his way turned to stare after him. With comprehension of his purpose, the crowd drew back, retreating to watch him from the outer boundaries of the *hocoka*, the hollow center of the camp. He took the first pony he came to, and swung up onto its back, the lance in his right fist.

"*Ho sunka!* You who ran away from the Comanche camp and left us to be killed! Hear me!"

His hoarse voice boomed through the sudden hush, hurling the insult of all insults, the charge of cowardice

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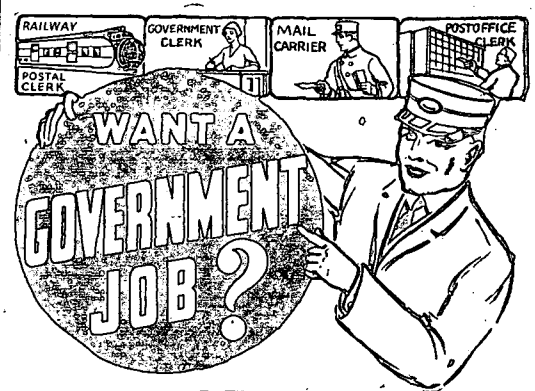

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and betrayal. "He who ran home, and lied—where is that whining *sunka?* Where is that cowardly dog and spawn of a dog? Does he hide with the women? Does he fear to come out and show himself? *Wagh!* Must I drag him out from his father's lodge and beat him around the camp? *Ho,* he comes—he comes! I call to the dog and he comes! Get your lance and a pony, *sunka,* and face me!"

RUNNING DOG emerged from his father's lodge, muttering, twisting his lips, his face purplish and a red glow under his eyes and over his cheekbones. He stepped forward, one slow stride at a time, until he stood in the *hocoka* facing the squat challenger. He flung off his robe behind him with a sudden whisk of his elbows, and then it was seen that he had his seven-shot carbine with him.

"*Waya-ta-nin makah*—may you eat dirt!" he howled, and fired. He fired again as the pony came launching at him, and laughed to see the animal crash down and turn over in a kicking somersault.

Bad Buffalo bounced on the ground, flipped over, and was on his feet, running forward with his lance upraised. He threw the lance as the muzzle of the carbine steadied on him for a third shot, and this was a fighting trick that he could do better than most. Any weapon in his hands was worth three on the enemy side. The lance slipped through the air like a live thing, stopped with a jar, and the thud of it was audible all around the camp.

Running Dog fell flat on his back, the shaft pointing upward, and he scraped his heels on the ground. A bellow came from the chief's lodge. Bad Buffalo left his lance where it was and picked up the carbine.

The carbine cracked, short and

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sharp. Black Horn, coming blundering out of his lodge with a smoothbore musket, dropped heavily. A low moan of horror went through the watching crowd. Bad Buffalo had shot down the chief. Nor did he appear to be shaken by any aftermath of the deed. He wheeled slowly, running his glowering regard over the crowd of faces, deliberate as an executioner.

"Blue Beaver—you were there! You left with him!"

"Yes, Bad Buffalo, but I—"

Crack! It was fine shooting, deadly shooting. Bad Buffalo didn't waste time in his aiming; just swung the carbine and pulled the trigger.

"And you, *Maza-ska!*"

Maza-ska—Flat Bone—thought to make a fight of it. He wrenched a gun from the hands of a neighbor, but never got its butt to his shoulder. After he fell, the owner of the gun made no motion toward retrieving his weapon.

"Enough, Bad Buffalo—enough!" Yellow Eagle strode out onto the *hocoka*. "Let this be enough killing!"

"*Nunwe*—so let it be," grunted the berserk warrior. He tramped over to the dead chief, kicked dust at the body, and tore the feathers from the hair. "Our chief is dead," he announced loudly, belligerently. "He lived long—too long—but now he lies dead. Let us now have a man for our chief; not a fat and lazy *ratawe!* Do we not go to war soon? Then we need a warrior to lead us."

Some of the younger braves, thinking he was casting out a hint for himself, began calling: "Bad Buffalo—let him be chief!"

For the first time Bad Buffalo evinced some abashment. He rubbed his nose with the back of his hand, self-conscious as a boy. "No, I can never make a chief," he disclaimed embarrassedly. "I am not wise nor good, and I shall never live to be a wise old man. It is Yellow Eagle I think of as chief. He is brave and wise. He is a great warrior. He has many friends."

A rumble of approval gave plenty of foundation for the last statement.

THAT night Chief Yellow Eagle held an emergency council with his leading men. "We must move away from here," he warned. "The soldiers are coming to make war on us, and there are not enough of us to fight them off. We must take our women and children out of their way. It is winter all over the land, and colder in the north. Some of the old ones may die on the trail. We will lose ponies. The soldiers will come fast after us, and we must hurry. But these are things that must be suffered. I am for joining Crazy Horse in the north, and fighting with his men against the soldiers!"

Wapaha Jim got to his feet a little painfully. The shaman had done well with his herbs and potions, but his skill was not magic, and Wapaha Jim's feet were still tender and raw. "In another council I talked against war with the soldiers," he reminded them. "I said they would not attack us. Now I know that my tongue is foolish. I was wrong. My eyes were blinded because I thought of them as my people. They come to kill! Let us go to the camp of Crazy Horse, and fight when the time comes! I am ready!"

"And I!" growled Bad Buffalo.

"And I," came the low voice of Long Mane, and every man present gave his assenting grunt.

Iron Breast rose and waited his turn to speak. He faced the new

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chief, his lifelong friend. "You have said that the soldiers will follow fast after us. They will, and they ride big horses. We shall be heavily loaded. We shall have our women and children, and the old ones to care for. If the snow stops and they find our trail, how can we hope to escape from them?"

That strong eventuality already lay in the minds of most, and they nodded. Yellow Eagle, no master of strategy, eyed his old friend reproachfully. "Should we stay here till they come?" he demanded. "Should we wait and let them kill us? You grow old, Iron Breast!"

The old warrior smiled. "Old," he agreed. "But it is the cunning wolf that lives to old age. Listen. Often the soldiers have Crow scouts with them—but what does a Crow know of Sioux country? The soldiers would like to have a Sioux for their scout—a Sioux who had turned against his own people. And that Sioux, telling them that he was leading them after his people, could take them somewhere else and lose them, while his people hurried safely on to the camp of Crazy Horse!"

IT was something of a novel idea to all of them, an innovation in war strategy that left them struggling to grasp its possibilities. They frowned, thinking it over, and one by one their faces brightened. Bad Buffalo jumped up, grinning his crooked grin. "Good!"

"And," finished Iron Breast, "*I* am the one!"

Wapaha Jim had been thinking hard along a reluctant course, but his conclusion was definite. "No," he said soberly, "not you, Iron Breast. They would not trust you. They could see what you are. Would a brave old warrior betray his people? They know he would not. They would shoot you and come on. *Maya*, they shoot Sioux on sight, as I know! But if a white man went to them—a man they think is—"

"Wapaha—not you!" cried Yellow Eagle.

"Who could do this better?" Wapaha Jim countered. "I know their talk. I remember many of their ways. When I wear no feather and no paint, men can see that I was not born a Sioux. I can tell them that I know the Indian camps. I can show them that I know the country well. I can guide them far away from your trail. Later I shall slip away from them and join you in the north."

Yellow Eagle kept shaking his head. "Mad—mad! You will be killed!" But the rest were nodding admiringly. This kind of daring impudence appealed to them.

Bad Buffalo strode over and faced Wapaha Jim. "It would mean that you go alone, without me," he complained aggrievedly. "Are we not blood brothers? Have we not sworn to die together when the time comes? No, let Iron Breast go!"

"I go." Wapaha Jim touched him briefly. "We shall be together again, after this is done. Perhaps I shall find a chance to avenge Luta-ho-ota before I leave them. Perhaps I shall learn which ones of them killed her. Will you lend me your gun? I broke mine on a soldier."

"Anything I have, Wapaha, you know—"

"Take mine," cut in Long Mane in his soft, toneless voice. "It is a good gun, and I have plenty of bullets for it. I took it from a Crow. If you find those ones, Wapaha, use it. Use it for me!"

Next morning in a near blizzard they struck camp, piled bag and bag-

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gage onto the patient pack horses, and moved out. There was no singing, no noisy wrangling among the touchy old men, no lusty joking among the young. The very old and the very young rode muffled against the biting cold, their faces blue, whimpering quietly. The women were silent, the men grim. They had a long, long way to travel, up there to the big armed camp of Crazy Horse, warrior chief of the Sioux nations. Up there in the country of the mighty Yellowstone River. Up there where winter came from.

Wapaha Jim had made his farewells. He watched the riding column and the drive of spare ponies go winding off through the snow, and loneliness ran through him. The abandoned camp site had a brooding air of desolation and emptiness, and he had to shake off a heavy sense of foreboding. The last group of riders, Yellow Eagle and Bad Buffalo among them, turned and raised their right arms in a last farewell to him. They were depending on him. The whole band looked to him to see that they got safely out of the country without running afoul of the soldiers who sought them. From habit Wapaha Jim touched the beaded pouch that hung under his left armpit, for luck. As an afterthought he removed it and tucked it into his buckskin shirt. White men did not wear war charms.

He reined his pony around and rode eastward, following the river. The distance widened between himself and the traveling column, and at last, when he looked back, he saw only the snow and the empty land.

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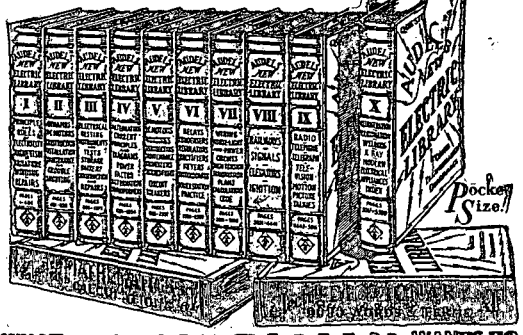

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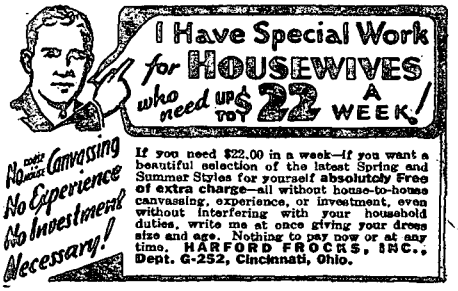

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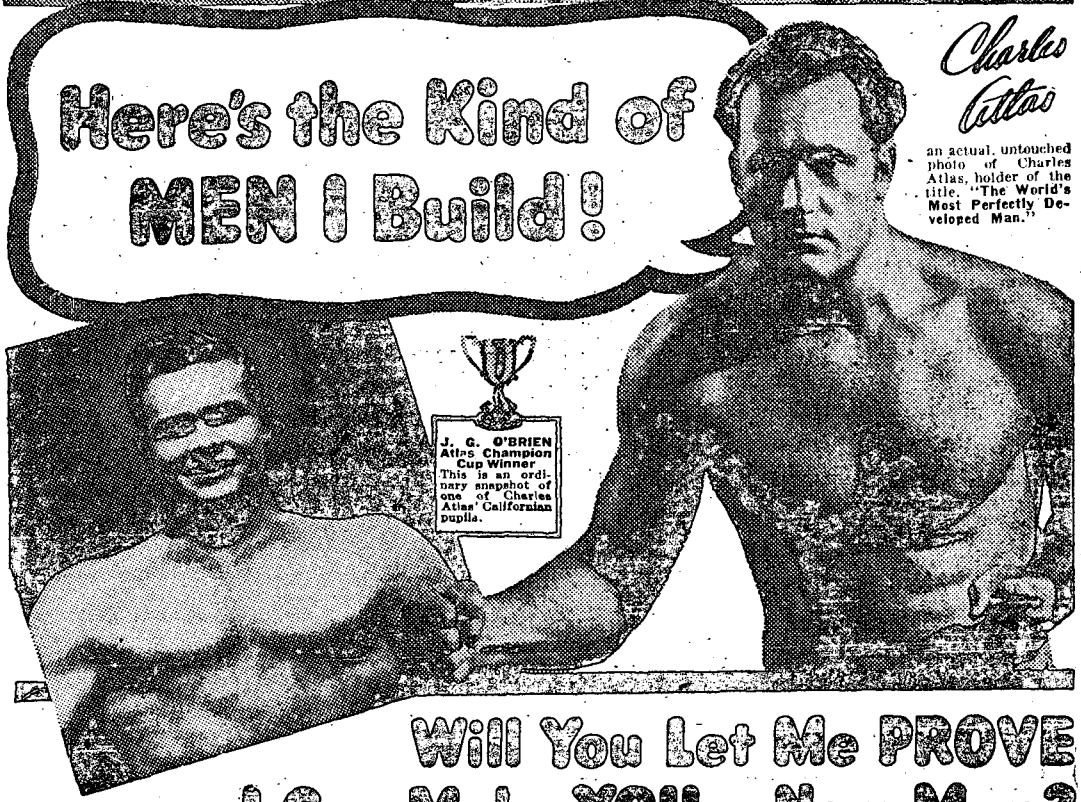

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UNION-MADE **Lee**

"America's Favorite Clothes for Men of Action!"

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See These Famous Lee Outfits Coast-to-Coast At 30,000 Lee Dealers!

REPRODUCED BY UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
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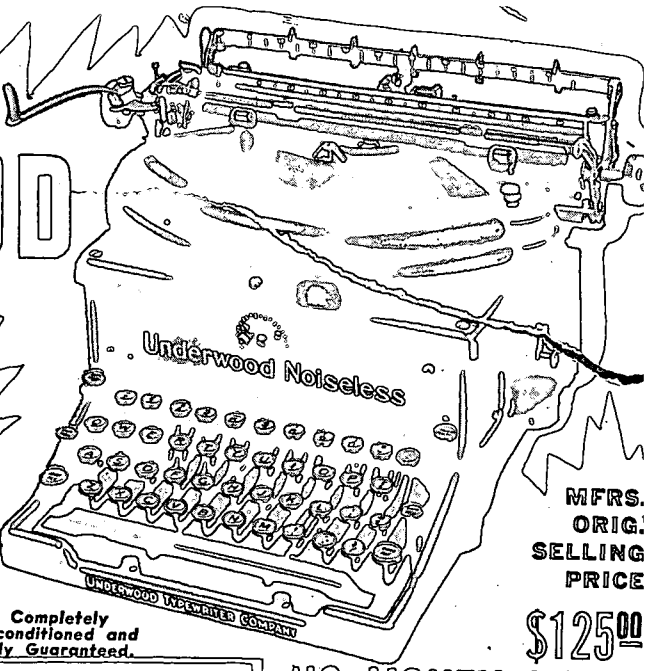
Genuine-Late UNDERWOOD NOISELESS

Now $39.85 CASH

OR

EASY TERMS—70c A WEEK



Completely Reconditioned and Fully Guaranteed.

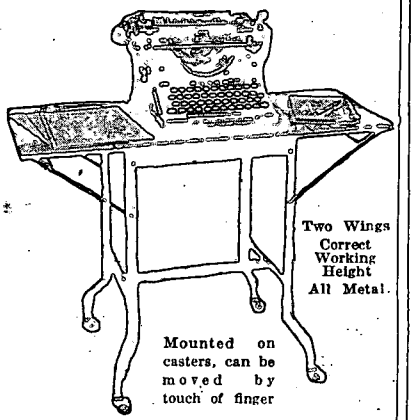
MFRS. ORIG. SELLING PRICE $125.00

Truly the most outstanding offer I have given my customers in years! Only because of an exceptional purchase can I sell these completely reconditioned machines at the sensationally low price of $39.85 (cash) or on easy terms of 70c a week. Each one carefully gone over and refinished so that its lustre gives it the appearance of a brand new machine costing over three times as much. *The mfrs. orig. selling price on this Underwood was $125.00.* It's sent to you in Underwood packing box with Underwood book of instructions on care and operation.

A NOISELESS MACHINE

Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with SILENCE. For those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. This Underwood's Noiseless mechanism eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models. *An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy.* This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. You get all the features of an Underwood **PLUS Noiseless typing.**

EXTRA VALUE!
TYPEWRITER STAND



For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $3.50 extra—payable 25c a month. **Quality built. Note all its convenient features.**

NO MONEY DOWN
10 DAY TRIAL
Easy Terms—10c A Day

No obligation to buy. See machine on wide open 10 day trial. Pay me no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 70c a week or $3.00 a month until term price of only $43.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. **There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.**

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.

FIRST CHOICE OF TYPISTS

OVER 5,000,000 UNDERWOODS NOW IN USE! Recognized as the finest, strongest built! Here is an office size Underwood with late modern features that give you **SILENT TYPING.** Has all standard equipment—keyboard, 2 colors, back spacer, automatic reverse, tabulator, etc. **THERE IS NO RISK! SEE BEFORE YOU BUY ON MY 10 DAY NO OBLIGATION TRIAL PLAN.** If you wish send the machine back at my expense.

WIDE 14" CARRIAGES

Wide carriage machines for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc., only $3.00 extra with order. Takes paper 14" wide, has 12" writing line. **A Real Buy in a Reconditioned Underwood Noiseless!**

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A complete home study course of famous Van Sant Touch Typing system. *Learn to type quickly and easily.* Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for home use.

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Send Underwood Noiseless (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($43.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect. ☐ 10" carriage. ☐ 14" carriage ($3.00 extra)
☐ Check for typewriter stand ($3.50 extra—payable 25c a month). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

Name ..... Age.....
Typewritten signatures not acceptable
Address .....
City ..... State.....
CAUTION—For quick shipment give occupation and reference

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